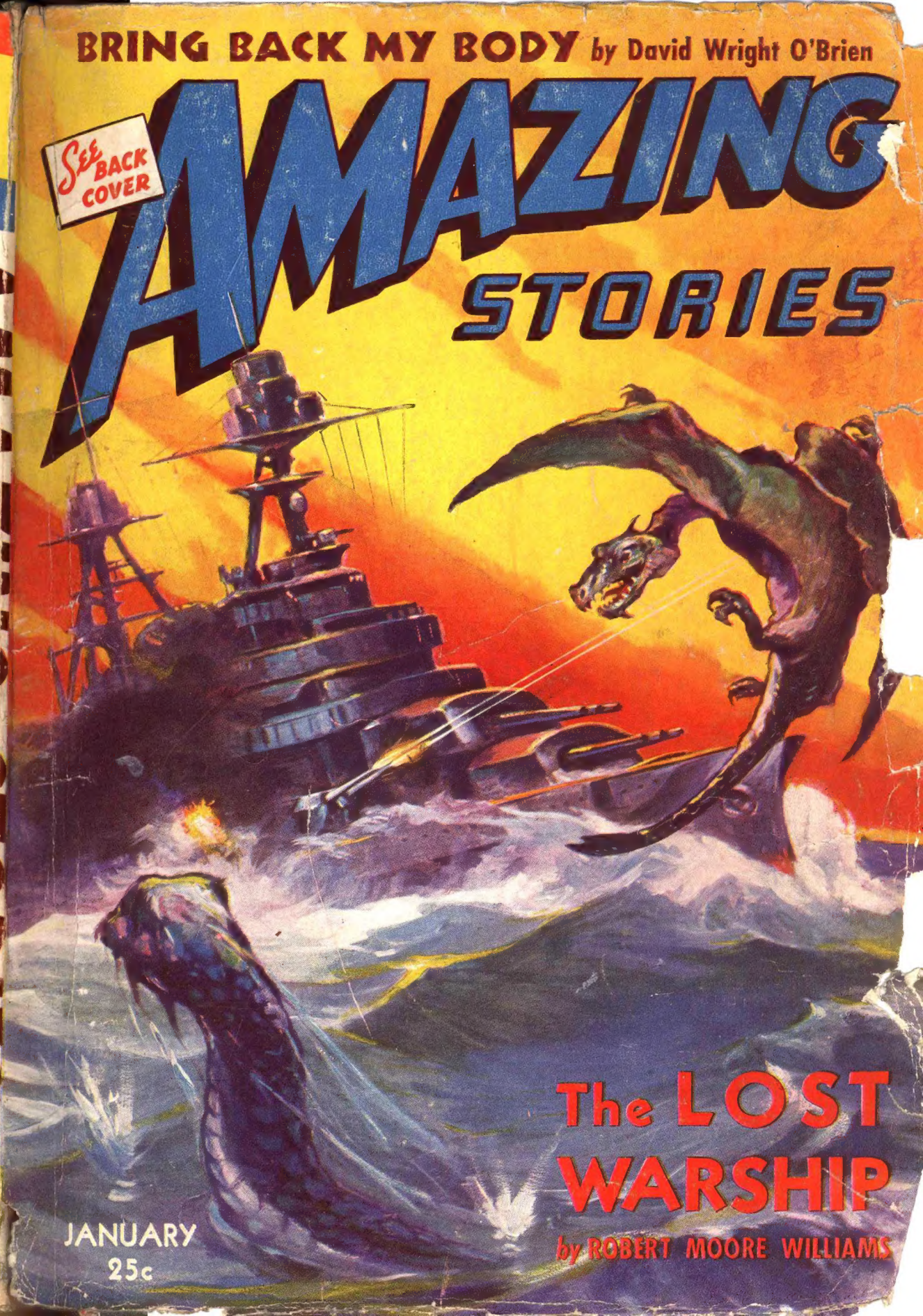
VOLUME 17
NUMBER 1

AMAZING STORIES

JANUARY
1943

BRING BACK MY BODY by David Wright O'Brien

See Back Cover



AMAZING STORIES

The LOST WARSHIP
by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

JANUARY
25c

Pityrosporum ovale, the strange "bottle bacillus" regarded by many leading authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John, illustrating a scene from "The Lost Warship"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles, depicting the "Sailing Ship of Venus"
Illustrations by J. Allen St. John, Virgil Finlay, Rod Ruth, Brady, Robert Fuqua, H. W. McCauley, Joe Sewell

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Volume 17 Number 1

The Magic *of Mind*

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

It is time you realized that the rites, rituals and practices of the ancients were not superstitions, but subterfuges to conceal the marvelous workings of natural law from those who would have misused them. Telepathy, projection of thought, the materializing of ideas into helpful realities, are no longer thought by intelligent persons to be impossible practices, but instead, *demonstrable sciences,* by which a greater life of happiness may be had.

One of America's foremost psychologists and university instructors, says of his experiments with thought transference and the powers of mind—"The successes were much too numerous to be merely lucky hits and one can see no way for guessing to have accounted for the results." *Have you* that open-minded attitude of today which warrants a clear, positive revelation of the facts of mind which intolerance and bigotry have suppressed for years? *Advance with the times;* learn the truth about your inherited powers.

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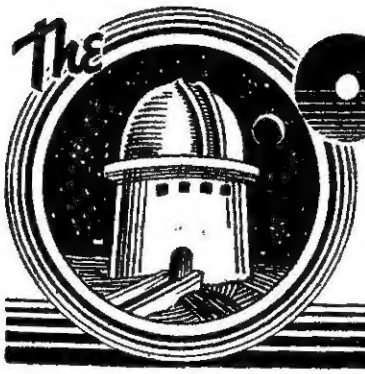

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

JUDGING from the tremendous noise in your editor's ears, there's going to be a hell of a storm—or is that loud concussion just Howard Browne's "Warrior of the Dawn" going over with a bang! Which is an exclamation, and not a question, so don't go correcting our punctuation.

The first part of this new serial has received so much comment, we feel that this issue, containing the second and concluding instalment, is bound to be a memorable one, both in the minds of our readers, and on our own personal editorial record of achievements. When we please our readers to this extent, it is "achievement"!

PERHAPS Mr. Browne owes a large measure of Tharn's initial success to artist J. Allen St. John for one of the finest covers ever painted for a caveman story. As usual, our art department, in their enthusiasm for giving you the best color obtainable in the rainbow, gazed at the "flatness" of the color in this cover and groaned. Now why don't you readers write a few letters to the art department and give them your opinions straight? We, the editors, are getting weary trudging in there with letters burdened with ecstasy over our covers and the way they are executed.

"I have a cousin in the Smithsonian Institute!"

INCIDENTALLY, here's big news: the February issue of AMAZING STORIES will feature the first of a new John Carter series. Edgar Rice Burroughs returns with "Skeleton Men of Jupiter," and of course the cover is by St. John. So, any of you readers who miss that issue will have only yourselves to blame—because we've warned you sufficiently in advance.

IN ADDITION to the conclusion of the Tharn story in this issue, we have a sparkling novel by Robert Moore Williams (another St. John cover, by golly!) and we want to recommend this yarn with all whistles blowing!

Our newest regular writer seems to have graduated with "Queen of the Flaming Diamond," which is illustrated by that much-demanded artist, Virgil Finlay.

Whenever we see the name, John York Cabot, we immediately expect something special—and you'll find exactly that in "Rats in the Belfry." The rats in this belfry are *really* rats, and we don't mean maybe!

Once in a while Stanton A. Coblentz writes a short story that gives his famous novels a run for the money. He's done it this time with "The Cosmic Deflector." A clever tale, if we do say it ourselves.

Maybe you'll say "Death Makes a Mistake," by P. F. Costello is more on the fantasy side than on the science fiction side, but we have an idea you expect great variety in the old aristocrat. AMAZING STORIES is perhaps unique in its field, largely because it lives up to its title. We know you'll find this story amazing, in more ways than one!

CABOT had better watch out! A fellow named Clee Garson is reaching out for his laurels. Garson gives us "Direct Wire" in this issue, featuring a telephone that carries a sensational conversation indeed! *(Continued on page 96)*

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The Lost Warship

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Jap bombs rained down, there was a tremendous blast—and a weird thing happened to the *Idaho*

THE sun came up over a glassy, motionless sea. In the life-boat, Craig arranged the piece of sail to protect them from the sun. He hoisted it to the top of the improvised mast, spreading it so that it threw a shadow on the boat. There was no wind. There had been no wind for three days.

Craig stood up and swept his eyes around the circle of the sea. The horizon was unbroken. As he sat down he was aware that the girl, Margy Sharp, who had been sleeping at his feet, had awakened.

"See anything, pal?" she whispered.

He shook his head.

Her pinched face seemed to become more pinched at his gesture. She sat up. Her eyes went involuntarily

The dragon was too big, too hard, to be killed by a man with a club . . . there could be but one ending

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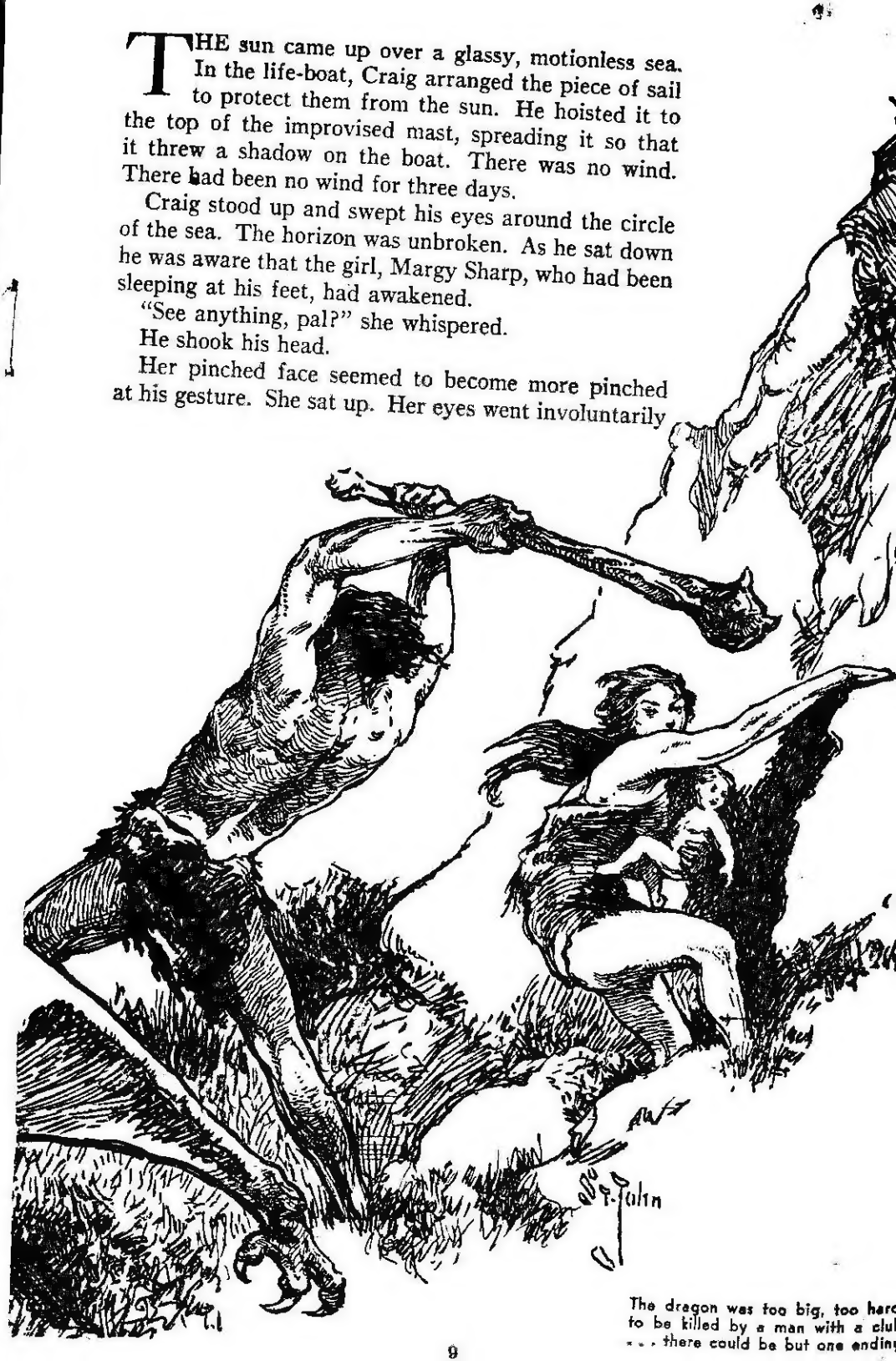

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to the keg of water beside Craig. She licked her parched, cracked lips.

"How's for a drink, pal?" she asked.

"A quarter of a cup is all we get today," Craig said. "Do you want your share now or will you wait and take it later?"

"I'm terribly thirsty," the girl said. She glanced quickly back at the others in the boat. They were still sleeping.

"How about slipping me a whole cup?" she asked, her bold blue eyes fixed intently on Craig's face.

Craig looked at the sea.

"They're asleep," the girl said quickly. "They won't ever know."

Craig said nothing.

"Please," the girl begged.

Craig sat in silence. He was a big man with a great thatch of black hair and hard gray eyes. He was clad in a pair of torn duck trousers. Rolled bottoms revealed bare feet. He wore no shirt. Holstered on his belt was a heavy pistol.

"Look, big boy," the girl cajoled. "Me and you could get along all right."

"What makes you think so?" Craig questioned.

This was apparently not the answer she had expected. She seemed to be startled. For a moment her eyes measured the man.

"You've been looking for something that you wanted very badly," she said. "You haven't found it. Because you haven't found it, you have become bitter."

Her words made Craig uncomfortable. They came too close to the truth. He shifted his position on the seat.

"So what?" he said.

"So nothing," the girl answered. "Except that we are two of a kind."

"And because we are two of a kind, we can get along?" he questioned.

"Yes," she answered. She made no effort to hide the longing in her eyes. "Look, Craig, me and you, we're tough." She gestured contemptuously at the others in the boat. "*They* aren't tough."

"Aren't they?"

"No." The words came faster now, as if she had made up her mind to say what she had to say and be damned with the consequences. "They're going to die. Oh, you needn't shake your head. You haven't fooled me for a minute with your pretending there will be a ship along to pick us up. There won't be a ship. Our only hope is that we may drift ashore on an island. It may be days before we find an island. There isn't enough water to keep us all alive that long. So—"

She couldn't quite finish what she had to say. Craig watched her, his eyes cold and unrevealing. Her gaze dropped.

"So why don't you and I split the water and let the others die of thirst because we are tough and they aren't? Is that what you mean?" he asked.

"No—" She faltered. "N—no." Defiance hardened her face. "Yes!" she snapped. "That's what I mean. Why should we take care of them? We don't owe them anything. Why should we die with them? What have they—or anybody else—ever done for us? I'll tell you the answer. Nothing. Nothing! *Nothing!*"

"Because they have done nothing for us and because we are the stronger, we let them die. Is that what you mean?"

"Y—yes."

CRAIG sat in silence for a moment. Dark thoughts were in his mind but his face showed nothing. "I have a gun," he said, "the only gun in the boat. That makes me the boss. Why don't I keep all the water for myself and let the rest of you die of thirst?"

"Oh, you wouldn't do that!" Fright showed on her face.

"Why wouldn't I?" Craig challenged.

"Because—oh, because—"

"What have you got to offer me that is worth a cup of water?" he demanded.

"What have I got that you want?" she answered. Her eyes were fixed hungrily on Craig's face.

"What have you got that I want! Oh, damn it, girl—" The big man twisted uncomfortably. He avoided her gaze, looking instead at the glassy sea.

"Is it time to wake up?" a new voice asked. It was the voice of Mrs. Miller, who had been lying in the middle of the boat. She raised herself to her knees, looked around at the glassy sea. "I thought—" she whispered. "For a moment I thought I was home again. I guess I must have been —dreaming." She pressed her hands against her eyes to shut out the sight of the sea.

"Is it time to have a drink?" she said, looking at Craig.

"No," he said.

"But we always have a drink in the morning " Mrs. Miller protested.

"Not this morning," Craig said.

"May I ask why? Are we—are we out of water?"

"We still have water," Craig answered woodenly.

"Then why can't I have some? I—well, I guess I don't need to tell you why I need a drink."

The reason she needed water was obvious. Worse than anyone else in the boat, Mrs. Miller needed a drink.

"Sorry," Craig shook his head.

"Why?"

"Well, if you must know," Craig said uncomfortably. "Margy and I have decided to keep all the water for ourselves."

"Damn you, Craig!" Margy Sharp said quickly.

"You two have decided—to keep all the—water?" Mrs. Miller said slowly, as if she was trying to understand the meaning of the words. "But what—what about the rest of us?"

"It's too bad for the rest of you," Craig said. He was aware that Margy Sharp was gazing frantically at him but he ignored her. Picking up a tin cup, he held it under the faucet in the side of the keg. A thin stream of water trickled out. He filled the cup half full, and handed it to Margy Sharp.

"Drink up," he said. "Double rations for you and me."

THE girl took the cup. She looked at Craig, then glanced quickly at Mrs. Miller. Her parched lips were working but no sound came forth. She looked at the water and Craig could see the movement of her throat as she tried to swallow.

Mrs. Miller said nothing. She stared at Craig and the girl as if she did not understand what she was seeing.

"Damn you, Craig," Margy Sharp said.

"Go on and drink," the big man answered. "That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"Y—yes."

"Then drink!"

"Oh, damn you—" Tears were in the girl's eyes. While Craig watched woodenly, she turned and crawled back to where Mrs. Miller was sitting.

"Craig was only teasing," she said gently. "He's a great teaser. He meant for you to have the water all the time. Here, Mrs. Miller, this is for you."

"Thank you, dear; thank you ever so much." Mrs Miller drank the water slowly, in little sips. Margy Sharp

watched her. Craig could see the girl trembling. When the last drop was gone, she brought the cup back to Craig —and flung it in his face.

"I could kill you!" she gasped.

"I gave you what you wanted," he said. His voice was impersonal but the hardness had gone from his eyes.

Sobbing, Margy Sharp collapsed in the bottom of the boat. She hid her face in her hands.

"Here," Craig said.

She looked up. He had drawn a fourth of a cup of water and was holding it toward her.

"I—I gave my share to Mrs. Miller," she whispered.

"I know you did," Craig answered. "This is my share."

"But—"

"Water would only rust my stomach," he said. "Take it."

The girl drank. She looked at Craig. There were stars in her eyes.

He leaned forward and patted her on the shoulder. "You'll do, Margy," he said. "You'll do."

THE boat floated in the glassy sea. The long ground swell of the Pacific, marching aimlessly toward some unknown shore, lifted it steadily up and down, giving the boat the appearance of moving. An empty tin can, thrown overboard three days previously, floated beside the boat. A school of flying fish, fleeing from some pursuing maw beneath the surface, skipped from wave to wave.

Besides Craig, Margy Sharp, and Mrs. Miller, there were three other persons in the boat, all men. They were: English, a blond youth; Michaelson, a little bird of a man who seemed not yet to have comprehended what had happened to them, or to care; and Voronoff, whose chief distinguishing characteristic was a pair of furtive eyes. English had been wounded. He sat up and looked over the side of the boat. Pointing, he suddenly cried out:

"Look! Look! There's a dragon! A flying dragon!"

"Easy, old man," Craig said gently. For two days English had been delirious. The infection that had developed in his wound was quite beyond the curative powers of the simple medicines carried among the emergency stores of the life boat.

"It's a dragon!" the youth shouted. "It's going to get us."

He stared at something that he could see coming through the air.

Craig drew his pistol. "If it comes after us, I'll shoot it," he said, displaying the gun. "See this pistol."

"That won't stop *this* dragon," English insisted. "Oh—oh—" His eyes widened with fright as he watched something coming through the sky. He ducked down in the bottom of the boat, hid his face in his hands. Men, caught unprotected in the open by a bombing raid, threw themselves to the ground like that, while they waited for the bombs to fall. A few minutes later, English looked up. Relief showed on his face.

"It's gone away," he said. "It flew over and didn't see us."

"There was no danger," Craig said gently. "It wouldn't have harmed us. It was a tame dragon."

"There aren't any tame dragons!" the youth said scornfully. He was looking again at the sea. "There's a snake!" he yelled. "A huge snake! It's got its head out of the water—"

"Poor kid," Margy Sharp whispered. "Can't we do something for him?"

"I'm afraid not," Craig answered. "But you might take him some water." He poured a generous share into the cup, watched the girl take it to the youth, who drank it eagerly.

MICHAELSON and Voronoff, awakened by the hysterical cries of the youth, were sitting up. Michaelson stared incuriously around him, like a bird that finds itself in a strange forest and wonders how he got there. Then he pulled a small black notebook out of his pocket and began studying it. Ever since he had been in the life boat he had been studying the contents of the notebook, ignoring everything else.

"What's the idea of wasting water on *him?*" Voronoff said sullenly, nodding his head toward English. Margy Sharp was holding the cup to the youth's lips.

"What?" Craig was startled.

"He's done for," Voronoff asserted. He seemed to consider the statement sufficient. He did not attempt to explain it.

A cold glitter appeared in Craig's eyes. "So why waste water on him?" he questioned. "Is that what you mean?"

"That's exactly what I mean," Voronoff answered. "Why waste water on a dead man? We don't have any too much water anyhow."

"Go to hell!" Craig said contemptuously.

"You can say that because you've got the gun," Voronoff said.

Craig's face turned gray with anger but he controled his temper. "If you think you can taunt me into throwing the gun away, you are mistaken," he said. "In the meantime, I have issued water to everyone else and I assume you and Michaelson will want your shares. If you will come aft, one at a time, I will see that you get it."

"Water?" said Michaelson vaguely. He had paid no attention to the argument. When he heard his name mentioned, he looked up and smiled. "Water? Oh, yes, I believe I would like some." He came aft and Craig held the tin cup under the faucet in the keg. The water rilled out very slowly. Craig stared at it in perplexity. The stream dried to a trickle, then stopped running.

Horror tightened a band around his heart. He lifted the keg, shook it, then set it down.

Michaelson gazed at the few drops of water in the cup. "What is the matter?" he asked. "Is this all I get?"

"The keg is almost empty!" Craig choked out the words.

"Empty?" Michaelson said dazedly. "But yesterday you said it was a quarter full!"

"That was yesterday," Craig said. "Today there isn't over two cups of water left in the keg."

Silence settled over the boat as he spoke. He was aware that four sets of eyes were gazing steadily at him. He picked up the keg, examined it to see if it were leaking. It wasn't. When he set it down, the eyes were still staring at him. There was accusation in them now.

"*You* were the self-appointed guardian of the water supply," Voronoff spat ou the words.

Craig didn't answer.

"Last night, when we were asleep, did you help yourself to the water?" Voronoff demanded.

"I did not!" Craig said hotly. "Damn you—"

Voronoff kept silent. Craig looked around the boat. "I don't know what happened to the water," he said. "I didn't drink it, that's certain—"

"Then what became of it?" Michaelson spoke.

He seemed to voice the question in the minds of all the others. If Craig had not taken the water, then what had happened to it? It was gone, the keg didn't leak, and he had been guarding it.

"And here I thought you were a good

guy," Margy Sharp said, moving aft.

"Honestly, I didn't drink the water," Craig answered.

"Honestly?" she mocked him. "No wonder you were so generous about giving me your share this morning. You had already had all you wanted to drink."

Her voice was bitter and hard.

"If you want to think that, I can't stop you," Craig said.

"I hope you feel good while you stay alive and watch the rest of us die of thirst," the girl said.

"Shut up!"

"I won't shut up. I'll talk all I want to. You won't stop me either. Do you hear that? You won't stop me!"

She was on the verge of hysteria. Craig let her scream. There was nothing he could do to stop her, short of using force. He sat silent and impassive on the seat. Hot fires smouldered behind his eyes. In his mind was a single thought: What had happened to the water?

THE boat drifted on the sullen sea. Michaelson, after trying to comprehend what had happened, and failing in the effort, went back to studying the figures in the notebook. Voronoff furtively watched Craig. English had lapsed into a coma. Mrs. Miller huddled in the middle of the boat. She watched the horizon, seeking a sail, a plume of smoke, the sight of a low-lying shore. Margy Sharp had collapsed at Craig's feet. She did not move. Now and then her shoulders jerked as a sob shook her body.

"Well," thought Craig, "I guess this is it. I guess this is the end of the line. I guess this is where we get off. What happens to you after you're dead, I wonder?"

He shrugged. Never in his life had he worried about what would happen after he died and it was too late to begin now.

He was so lost in his thoughts that he did not hear the plane until it had swooped low over them. The roar of its motor jerked his head to the sky. It was an American naval plane, the markings on its wings revealed.

The occupants of the boat leaped to their feet and shouted themselves hoarse. The pilot waggled his wings at them and flew off.

Against the far horizon the superstructure of a warship was visible. It was coming closer. Craig put his fingers to his nose, wiggled them at the sea.

"Damn you, we beat you," he said.

He knew they hadn't beaten the sea. Luck and nothing else had brought that warship near them. Luck had a way of running good for a time. Then it ran bad.

CHAPTER II

When the Sun Jumped

"THE captain wishes to see you, sir," the sailor said.

Craig snubbed the cigarette and rose to his feet. He had eaten and drank sparingly, very sparingly indeed. They had tried to take him to the hospital bay with the others, but he had gruffly refused. There was nothing wrong with him that a little food and water wouldn't cure.

He followed the sailor to the captain's quarters. Unconsciously he noted the condition of the ship. She was a battleship, the Idaho, one of the new series. Craig guessed she was part of a task force scouting the south Pacific. She was well kept and well manned, he saw. The men went about their tasks with a dash that was heartwarming.

The captain was a tall man. He

rose to his feet when Craig entered his quarters, smiled, and held out his hand, "I'm Captain Higgins," he said.

Craig looked at him, blinked, then grinned. He took the out-stretched hand.

"Hi, Stinky," he said. "It's good to see you again."

"Stinky!" Higgins choked. "Sir—"

"Don't get stuffy," Craig said, laughing.

Higgins stared at him. Little by little recognition began to dawn on the captain's face. "Craig!" he whispered. "Winston Craig! This calls for a drink."

"It does, indeed," Craig answered.

Captain Higgins provided the whiskey. It was Scotch. They drank it straight.

"Where on earth have you been?" Higgins asked.

"Gold," Craig said. "Borneo." A frown crossed his face. "Our little brown brothers came down from the north."

"I know," said Higgins grimly. "They came to Pearl Harbor too, the little—. They ran you out of Borneo, eh?"

"I got out," Craig said.

"But this lifeboat you were in? What happened?"

"Jap bombers happened. They caught the ship I was on. Luckily we managed to get a few boats away—"

"I see. Where are the other boats?"

"Machine-gunned," Craig said. "A rain squall came along and hid us so they didn't get around to working on the boat I was in." He shrugged. "We were ten days in that boat. I was counting the jewels in the Pearly Gates when your task force came along. But enough about me. What about you?"

Higgins shrugged. "What you can see," he said.

Craig nodded. He could see plenty. The boy who had been known as "Stinky" in their days at Annapolis was boss of a battle wagon.

"I heard you resigned your commission within a year after we had finished at the Academy," Higgins said.

"Yes," Craig answered.

"Mind if I ask why?"

"Not at all. I just wanted some action and it didn't look as if I could get it in the Navy. So—"

IT WAS not so much what Craig said as what he left unsaid that was important. He was a graduate of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. He and Stinky Higgins had finished in the same class. Higgins had stayed with the Navy. Craig had not been able to endure the inactivity of belonging to a fighting organization when there was no fighting to be done. He was born with the wanderlust, with itching feet, with the urge to see what lay beyond the farthermost horizon.

"So you were prospecting for gold?" Captain Higgins asked.

"Yes."

"What are you going to do now, if I may ask?"

"Well," Craig said, "I was on my way back to the States, to join up again, if they would take me."

Higgins grinned. "If they would take you? They will grab you with open arms. They could use a million like you."

"Thanks," Craig said.

A knock sounded on the door.

"What is it?" Higgins said to the aide who entered.

"One of the men we picked up in the lifeboat wants to see you, sir."

"What about?"

"He would not say, sir. He insists it is of the utmost importance. His name is Michaelson, sir. Shall I show him to your quarters?"

"Very well. I'll see him immediately."

The aide saluted smartly and left.

"Who is this Michaelson?" Higgins said to Craig.

"I don't know," Craig shrugged. "Just one of the passengers in the lifeboat. We didn't ask each other for pedigrees. About all I can say about him is that he is a queer duck." Craig explained how Michaelson had been constantly studying the contents of the notebook he carried.

The captain frowned. "There is a Michaelson who is a world-famous scientist," he said. "I don't suppose this could be he."

"Might be," Craig said. "This is the south seas. You never know who is going to turn up down here or what is going to happen." Abruptly he stopped speaking. A new sound was flooding through the ship.

It had been years since he had heard that sound yet he recognized it instantly. The call to action stations! It could have only one meaning. The Idaho was going into action. Something thrilled through Craig's blood at the thought. He turned questioning eyes toward the captain.

Higgins was already on the phone.

"Flight of Jap bombers approaching," he said, flinging the phone back on its hook. "Come on."

This was probably the first time in naval history that a bare-footed, bareheaded man, whose sole articles of clothing consisted of a pair of dirty duck trousers, joined the commanding officer of a battleship on the captain's bridge. Captain Higgins didn't care what Craig was wearing, and his officers, if they cared, were too polite to show it. They didn't really care anyhow. They had other things on their minds.

Far off in the sky Craig could see what the officers had on their minds. A series of tiny black dots. They were so far away they looked like gnats. Jap bombers. Big fellows. Four-engined jobs.

The notes of the call to action stations were still screaming through the ship. The Idaho, at the touch of the magic sound, was coming to life. Thirty-five thousand tons of steel was going into action. Craig could feel the pulsation as the engines kicked the screws over faster. The ship surged ahead. Fifteen hundred men were leaping to their stations. The guns in the big turrets were poking around, hoping that somewhere off toward the horizon there was a target for them. The Idaho was a new ship. She was lousy with anti-aircraft. The black muzzles of multiple pom-poms were swinging around, poking toward the sky.

An officer was peering through a pair of glasses. "Seventeen of them, sir," he said. "I can't be certain yet, but I think there is another flight following the first."

THE Idaho was part of a task force that included a carrier, cruisers, and several destroyers. Craig could see the carrier off in the distance. She had already swung around. Black gnats were racing along her deck and leaping into the sky. Fighter planes going up. Cruisers and destroyers were moving into pre-determined positions around the carrier and the Idaho, to add the weight of their anti-aircraft barrage to the guns carried by the big ships.

"Three minutes," somebody said in a calm voice. "They've started on their run."

The anti-aircraft let go. Craig gasped and clamped his hands over his ears. He had left the Navy before the advent of air warfare. He knew the roar of the big guns in their turrets but this

was his first experience with the guns that fought the planes. The sound was utterly deafening. If the fury of a hundred thunder-storms were concentrated into a single area, the blasting tornado of sound would not be as great as the thunder of the guns. The explosions beat against his skull, set his teeth pounding together. He could feel the vibrations with his feet.

High in the sky overhead black dots blossomed like death flowers blooming in the sky.

The bombers kept coming.

The anti-aircraft bursts moved into their path. Death reached up into the sky, plucking with taloned fingers for the black vultures racing with the wind. Reached and found their goal. One plane mushroomed outward in a burst of smoke.

Craig knew it was a direct hit, apparently in the bomb bay, exploding the bombs carried there. Fragments of the plane hung in the sky, falling slowly downward.

Up above the anti-aircraft, midges were dancing in the sun—fighter planes. They dived downward.

Abruptly a bomber fell out of formation, tried to right itself, failed. A wing came off. Crazily the bomber began spinning.

Black smoke gouted from a third ship. It began losing altitude rapidly.

The others continued on their course.

Michaelson suddenly appeared on the bridge.

How he got there, Craig did not know, but he was there, jumping around and waving his notebook in the air. Michaelson was shouting at the top of his voice.

"—Danger! —Must get away from here—"

Craig caught the shouted words. The thundering roar of the anti-aircraft barrage drowned out the rest.

No one paid any attention to Michaelson. They were watching the sky.

The planes had released their bombs.

For some reason they were not attacking their normal target, the carrier. Perhaps a second flight was making a run over the carrier. The first flight was bombing the battleship.

The Idaho was their target.

CRAIG could feel the great ship tremble as she tried to swerve to avoid the bombs. A destroyer would have been able to spin in a circle but 35,000 tons of steel do not turn so easily.

The bombs were coming down. Craig could see them in the air, little black dots growing constantly larger. Fighter planes were tearing great holes in the formation of the bombers. Few of the Jap ships would ever return to their base. But their job was already done.

The bombs hit.

They struck in an irregular pattern all around the ship. Four or five were very near misses but there was not one direct hit. Great waterspouts leaped from the surface of the sea. A sheet of flame seemed to run around the horizon. It was a queer, dancing, intensely brilliant, blue flame. It looked like the discharge from some huge electric arc.

Even above the roar of the barrage, Craig heard the tearing sound. Somehow it reminded him of somebody tearing a piece of cloth. Only, to make a sound as loud as this, it would have to be a huge piece of cloth and the person tearing it would have to be a giant.

The blue light became more intense. It flared to a brilliance that was intolerable.

At the same time, the sun jumped!

"I'm going nuts!" the fleeting thought was in Craig's mind. He wondered if a bomb had struck the ship.

Was this the nightmare that comes with death? Had he died in the split fraction of a second and was his disintegrating mind reporting the startling fact of death by telling him that the sun was jumping?

The sun couldn't jump.

It *had* jumped. It had been almost directly overhead. Now it was two hours down the western sky.

Tons of water were cascading over the bow of the ship. Waves were leaping over the deck. The Idaho seemed to have sunk several feet. Now her buoyancy was asserting itself and she was trying to rise out of the sea. She was fighting her way upward, rising against the weight of the water.

A wind was blowing. There had been almost no wind but now a gale of hurricane proportions was howling through the superstructure of the ship.

A heavy sea was running. The sea had been glassy smooth. Now it was covered with white caps.

The bombs had exploded, a blue light had flamed, a giant had ripped the sky apart, a gale had leaped into existence, the sea had covered itself with white capped waves, and the sun had jumped.

Craig looked at the sky, seeking the second flight of bombers. The air was filled with scudding clouds. There were no bombers in sight.

The anti-aircraft batteries, with no target, suddenly stopped firing.

Except for the howl of the wind through the superstructure, the ship was silent. The silence was so heavy it hurt the ears. The officers on the bridge stood without moving, frozen statues. They seemed paralyzed.

The ship was running herself.

"W—what—what the hell became of those Jappos?" Craig heard a dazed officer say.

"Yeah, what happened to those bombers?"

"Where did this wind come from?"

"There wasn't any wind a minute ago."

"Look at the sea. It's covered with white caps!"

"Something happened to the sun. I—I'm almost positive I saw it move."

Dazed, bewildered voices.

"What the devil became of the carrier?" That was the voice of Captain Higgins.

"And the rest of the force, the cruisers and destroyers—what became of them?"

Craig looked toward the spot where he had last seen the carrier. She had been launching planes.

He did not believe his eyes.

The carrier was gone.

The cruisers and destroyers that had been cutting foaming circles around the carrier and the battleship—were gone.

The surface of the sea was empty. There weren't even any puffs of exploding shells in the sky.

THE Idaho plunged forward through strange seas. From horizon to horizon there was nothing to be seen. The task force to which the ship belonged and the attacking Jap planes had both vanished. The group of officers responsible for the ship were dazed. Then, little by little, their long training asserted itself and they fought off the panic threatening them. Captain Higgins ordered the ship slowed until she was barely moving. This was to protect them from the possibility of hitting submerged reefs or shoals. The first question was—what had happened? Captain Higgins ordered radio silence broken. The ship carried powerful wireless equipment, strong enough to reach to the mainland of America, and farther.

The radio calls brought no response. The radio men reported all they could

get on their receivers was static. No commercial and no radio signals were on the air. This was impossible.

In growing bewilderment, Captain Higgins ordered a plane catapulted into the air, to search the surrounding sea. Meanwhile routine reports from all parts of the ship showed that the Idaho had suffered no damage of any kind from the bombing. She was in first-class shape. The only thing wrong with her was the men who manned her. They were bewildered. Defeat in battle they would have faced. They would not have flinched if the ship had gone down before superior gun power. They would have fought her fearlessly, dying, if need be, in the traditions of their service.

Craig was still on the bridge with Captain Higgins and the other officers. Although he did not show it, he was scared. Right down to the bottoms of his bare feet, he was scared. He watched the scouting plane catapulted into the air, and the grim thought came into his mind that Noah, sending forth the dove from the ark, must have been in a similar position. Like Noah, Captain Higgins was sending forth a dove to search the waste of waters.

Besides Craig, there was another civilian on the bridge, Michaelson. Nobody was paying any attention to him. Normally, if he had intruded without invitation to this sacred spot, he would have been bounced off so fast it would have made his head swim. But the officers had other things to think about besides a stray civilian who had popped out of nowhere. Michaelson, after fluttering vainly from officer to officer and getting no attention, turned at last to Craig. Michaelson was waving his note book.

"THESE men will pay no attention to me," Michaelson complained, nodding toward the officers.

"They got troubles," Craig said. "They've run into a problem that is driving them nuts."

"But I could help them solve their problem!" Michaelson said, irritation in his voice.

"Aw, beat it—Huh? What did you say?" Craig demanded.

"I can tell them what happened, if they will only listen. I was trying to warn them, before it happened, but I was unable to reach the bridge in time."

"You—*you know what happened?*" Craig choked.

"Certainly!" Michaelson said emphatically.

Craig stared at the little man. Michaelson did not look like he had much on the ball but he spoke excellent English, and even if he was a queer duck, he seemed to be intelligent. Craig remembered that Michaelson had been trying to reach the bridge just before the bombers struck, also that the man had been trying to get in touch with the captain just before the warning sounded that the bombers were approaching. Craig turned to the officers.

"Captain Higgins," he said.

"Don't bother me now, Craig," the captain snapped.

"There's a man here who wants to talk to you," Craig said.

"I have no time—" For the first time, the captain saw Michaelson. "Who the devil are you?" he snapped. "What are you doing on my bridge?"

"He's the man who wants to talk to you," Craig explained. "His name is Michaelson."

Michaelson smiled shyly. "You may have heard of me," he said.

"Are you Michaelson the scientist, the man who is called the second Einstein?" Higgins demanded.

Michaelson blushed. "I am a scientist," he said. "As for being a second

Einstein, no. There is only one Einstein. There can be only one. But it may be that I can help you with your problem."

Craig saw the attitude of the officers change. They had heard of Michaelson. It was a great name. Until then they had not known that he was on their bridge. They became respectful.

"If you can help us, shoot," Higgins said bluntly.

"I will try," the scientist said. He pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. "If you are familiar with geology you unquestionably know something about 'faults'. 'Faults' are unstable areas on the surface of the earth, places where, due to joints or cracks in the underlying strata of rocks, slippage is likely to take place. There is, for instance, the great San Adreas Rift, in California, which is a 'fault'."

"Sorry, Mr. Michaelson," Higgins interrupted. "If you've got something to say, say it, but don't start giving us a lecture on geology."

"In explaining the unknown, it is best to start with what is known," the scientist answered. "Earth faults are known. When I talk about them, you will understand me. However, there is another kind of fault that is as yet unknown, or known only to a few scientists who suspected its existence—" He paused. "I am referring to the space-time fault."

THE faces of the officers registered nothing. Craig frowned, but listened with quickened interest. A space-time fault! What was Michaelson talking about?

"You will not find a space-time fault mentioned in any scientific treatise," Michaelson continued. "There is no literature on the subject, as yet. Certain erratic phenomena, of which the apparent slowing of the speed of light in certain earth areas was the most important, led a few scientists to speculate on the existence of some strange condition of space and time that would account for the observed phenomena. The speed of light is regarded as being constant, yet in certain places on earth, for no apparent reason, light seemed to move slower than it did elsewhere. What was the reason for this strange slow-down? Investigation revealed the existence of what I have called a space-time fault."

"Please, Mr. Michaelson," Captain Higgins spoke. "We are not scientists. With all respect to your ability, I must request you to come directly to the point."

"Very well," the scientist said. "We have fallen into a space-time fault. I have been conducting certain researches in and near this area in an effort to locate the boundaries of what I had hoped would be called—since I discovered it—the Michaelson Fault. Under ordinary circumstances the ship would, in all probability, have passed directly through the fault, though I suspect, from certain data of ships that have disappeared mysteriously, that *all* ships have not always passed through the fault. In our case, the explosion of the bombs was sufficient to cause a momentary dislodgment of the space-time balance in this area, with the result that we were precipitated through the fault."

He paused and looked expectantly at his audience. It was his impression that he had made a complete explanation of what had happened. He expected the officers to understand. They didn't understand.

Craig, watching in silence, caught a vague glimpse of what the scientist was saying. He felt a cold chill run up and down his spine. If he understood Michaelson correctly—

"We were precipitated through the fault?" a lieutenant spoke. "I don't follow. What do you mean, sir?"

"Mean?" Michaelson answered. "I mean we passed through the fault."

"But what does that mean?"

"That we have passed through time!"

Craig was aware of a mounting tension when he heard the words. Then he had understood Michaelson correctly! He had been afraid of that. He saw from the faces of the officers that they either did not comprehend what the scientist had said, or comprehending, were refusing to believe.

"Passed through time!" somebody said. "But that is ridiculous.'

Michaelson shrugged. "You are thinking with your emotions," he said. "You are thinking wishfully. You hope we have not passed through time. Therefore you say it is not true."

"But," Captain Higgins spoke, "if we have passed through time, how far have we gone, and in what direction?"

"How far I cannot say," Michaelson answered. "There is little question of the direction: We have gone back. A space-time fault can only slip back. It cannot slip forward, or I cannot conceive of it slipping forward. As to the distance we have gone, in space, a few feet. In time, the distance may be an hundred thousand years. It may be a million years, or ten million." He tapped his notebook. "I have much data here, but not enough data to determine how far we have gone."

CRAIG was cold, colder than he had ever been in all his life. They had passed through time! Desperately he wanted to doubt that the scientist knew what he was talking about. His eyes sought the reassurance of the battleship. Surely such a mass of steel could not pass through time! But—the sun had jumped, a hurricane of wind had roared out of nowhere and was still roaring through the rigging of the ship. The calm sea had become storm-tossed. And—the radio was silent.

Was Michaelson right? Or was he a madman? Craig could not grasp completely the reasoning of the scientist. A space-time fault sounded impossible. But there was no question about the existence of earth faults. Craig had seen a few of those areas where the foundations of the earth had crumpled. If the inconceivable pressures of the planet could crush miles of rock like he could crush a playing card in his hands, why could not the more tenuous fabric of space-time be crushed also?

The faces of the officers reflected doubt. Craig saw them steal uneasy glances at each other, saw them glance at the bulk of the battleship for reassurance. The ship was their world.

Out of the corner of his eyes Craig saw something coming across the sea. At the same time, in the forepeak, a look-out sang out.

"I'm afraid," Craig said, pointing, "that now there is no doubt that Mr. Michaelson is right. Look there."

Sailing down the wind was a gigantic bird-lizard. With great fanged beak outstretched, it was flapping through the air on leathery wings. It was a creature out of the dawn of time.

It proved, by its mere existence, that Michaelson was right.

The Idaho, and all her crew, had passed through a space-time fault into an antedeluvian world!

CHAPTER III

The Return of the Dove

THERE were dozens of the great bird-lizards flapping about the

ship. Either they thought it was an enemy, to be attacked and destroyed, or they thought it was something to eat. In either event, it was to be attacked. They were attacking it. They would circle it, flap heavily to a point above, then launch themselves into a glide, fanged mouth open, screaming shrilly.

The anti-aircraft gunners knocked the beasts out of the air with ease.

On the bridge a group of tense officers watched the slaughter without being greatly interested in it. They knew that the guns of the Idaho were proof against any creature of earth, sky, or water, in this world. They were not afraid of the beasts of this strange time into which they had been thrust.

The scouting plane was still out, searching the waste of water for land.

The officers of the Idaho were all thinking the same thing. Captain Higgins put their thoughts into words.

"Mr. Michaelson," the captain said slowly. "I can't argue with you. I am forced to believe that somehow we have been forced back in time. However I am charged with the responsibility for this ship. Back where we came from, the Idaho is needed. I want to get her back where she belongs. How can we accomplish this?"

The scientist hesitated. He did not want to say what he had to say. He shook his head. "I question whether or not we can accomplish it," he said at last.

"But we *have* to return!" Higgins protested.

"I know," Michaelson said sympathetically. "The problem is *how!*"

"You mean there is no way to return?"

The scientist shrugged. "If there is, I do not know of it."

"But can't you make any suggestion? After all, this is your field. You're a scientist."

"This is my field but even I know little or nothing about it. Almost nothing is known about the true nature of the space-time continuum. Only recently have we even guessed that such things as space-time faults existed. We were hurled through this particular fault by accident, the result of an unfortunate combination of circumstances. Whether we can duplicate that accident, and whether it would return us to our own time—I just don't know. Nobody knows."

The officers of the Idaho received this information with no sign of pleasure. Craig felt sorry for them. After all, some of them had wives, all of them had friends back in the United States. Or was it *forward* in the United States, in the America that was to be? It was hard to remember that Columbus had not as yet sailed westward, would not sail westward for—how many hundreds of thousands of years?

All human history would have to unroll before there was an America. If the theory of continental drift was correct, there might not even be an American continent, it might still be joined to Europe. Babylon and Nineveh, Karnak and Thebes, Rome and London—there were no such cities in the world, would not be for—

THE men on this ship were probably the only human beings alive on earth! Men had not yet become human, or maybe hadn't. The Neanderthal Man, the Cro-Magnons, maybe the Java Man, the Piltdown Man, had not yet appeared on the planet!

"As I understand it," an officer said, "we were sailing directly across a space-time fault when the explosion of the bombs sent us through the fault? Is that correct?"

"That is correct," Michaelson answered.

"Then why don't we locate this fault and set off some explosions of our own?" the officer suggested. "Is there any chance that we might return—home—that way?"

"I don't know," the scientist frankly answered. "Maybe it would work, maybe it won't. We can certainly try it, and if it fails, nothing is lost. Meanwhile I will go over my data and see if I can find some way of accomplishing what we desire."

Michaelson went below. The Idaho was brought around. Immediately a worried officer posed another problem.

"How are we going to find that fault?" he asked. "We can't see it. We can't feel it. How are we going to know when we have reached the right place?"

"We'll search the whole area," Higgins said. "We haven't moved far and locating the fault ought not to be too difficult. For that matter, we are probably still in it."

The officers moved quickly and efficiently to put his orders into execution. The plan was to put the ship in the same position she had occupied when the bombs struck, then use the small boats to plant explosive charges in the water around the battle wagon, charges which could be electrically exploded from the ship. Captain Higgins moved to where Craig was standing. He took off his cap and wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"What do you make of this?" he asked.

Craig shrugged. "I pass," he said.

"But—one minute we were part of a task force and Jap bombers were having a go at us. The next minute—" Higgins looked helpless. "Damn it, Craig," he exploded, "things like that can't happen!"

"They aren't supposed to happen," the big man grimly answered. "We just saw one of them happen."

"But—" Higgins protested, "surely we would have known about these spacetime faults, if they existed. Other ships would have fallen into them."

"Maybe other ships have fallen into them," Craig suggested. "In the last war the Cyclops vanished without a trace. There have been other ships, dozens of them, that have disappeared. And, for that matter, how is the commander of your task force going to handle the disappearance of the Idaho?"

"I don't know," Higgins muttered.

"He is going to have to report the loss of the battleship. What will he say?"

"What can he say?"

"He'll search the area, for survivors and wreckage. When he finds neither the only conclusion he can reach will be that the Idaho was instantaneously sunk with the loss of all hands. Remember we were under attack at the time. Remember that intense blue light that flared around the horizon? To the men in the other ships that light may have looked like an explosion of the magazines of the Idaho. The admiral commanding your task force may report that a bomb seemingly passed down the smoke stack of the Idaho and the resulting explosion touched off the powder magazine."

CRAIG paused and in growing perplexity watched what Higgins was doing. The captain was vigorously kicking the steel wall of the bridge. He was pounding his right foot against it as if he was trying to kick it down. There was a look of pain on his face. Craig watched for a second, then grinned.

"Does it hurt?" he said.

"Yes!"

"Then it must be real," the big man suggested.

Higgins left off kicking the wall. Craig knew *why* he had been kicking

it—to assure himself that the wall was really there. Higgins was a man in a nightmare but instead of pinching himself to see if he was awake, he kicked the wall.

"Damn it!" the captain muttered. "Why did this have to happen to us?"

"Destiny," Craig mused. "Fate. How did the steamer I was on happen to get bombed? How did I happen to be in the lifeboat that wasn't machine-gunned? How did we happen to get picked up? The only answer is fate."

"That's a darned poor answer," Higgins said.

"It's the only answer," Craig replied. "Your dove is coming back."

"What? Have you gone wacky on me?" the startled captain answered.

Craig pointed to the sea. Barely visible on the horison was a tiny dot.

"Oh, the plane," the captain said, watching the dot. It was moving swiftly toward them.

Craig watched it, a frown on his face. "I thought you sent out only *one* plane," he said.

"That's right. I did send one."

"Well," Craig said slowly, "unless my eyes have gone bad, three planes are coming back."

"What?—But that's impossible?" Higgins snatched a pair of glasses, swiftly focused them on the plane. It was still only a dot in the sky. Two smaller dots were following swiftly behind it.

"Maybe a couple of those lizard-birds are chasing it?" Craig hazarded.

"Nonsense!" the captain retorted. "It can fly rings around those things. Those lizards are too slow to keep up with it. But there is something following it."

Higgins kept the glasses to his eyes, straining to see the approaching dots.

"If those things are planes," he muttered, and there was a note of exultation in his voice, "then Michaelson, and his talk of spacetime faults, is nuts."

What Higgins meant was, that if the two dots were planes, then what had happened to the Idaho had been an illusion of some kind. Planes could exist only in a modern world. They were one of mankind's most recent inventions.

The stubby-winged scouting plane from the ship was easily visible now. It was driving hell for leather for the Idaho. Craig watched it with growing apprehension.

"That pilot is running away from something," he said.

"Impossible!" Higgins snapped.

The plane swept nearer. It was flying at a low altitude. The two dots were hard on its heels. They were overtaking it. And—they were no longer dots.

"Planes!" Higgins shouted.

CRAIG kept silent. They were planes all right, but— He saw something lance out from one of them. The scouting plane leaped upward in a screaming climb. Something reached toward it again, touched it. It began to lose altitude. It was still coming toward the Idaho but it was on a long slant.

"It's b e i n g attacked!" Higgins shouted, pain in his voice.

Over the Idaho the call to battle stations rolled. Again the mighty vessel surged to the tempo of men going into action.

The scouting plane was dropping lower and lower. It hit the water. One of the pursuing ships dived down at it.

The anti-aircraft batteries let go. For the second time the Idaho was defending herself. Thunder rolled across the waters.

The attacking plane was within point-blank range. Mushrooms of black smoke puffed into existence around it, knocked it around in the air, caught it

with a direct hit.

A gigantic explosion sounded.

A ball of smoke burst where the plane had been. Fragments floated outward, slid downward to the sea. There was not enough of the plane left for identification.

The second plane lifted upward. For the first time Craig got a good look at it. His first impression, illogical as that was, was that it was a Jap ship. When it lifted up he got a good look at it. It wasn't a Jap plane. No marks of the rising sun were visible on its body.

Craig saw then that it wasn't a plane at all. It had stubby, sloping wings, but the wings were apparently more for the purpose of stabilizing flight than for the might impart. It looked like a flying wedge.

He could not tell how it was propelled. If it had a motor, he could not see it.

It was fast, faster than greased lightning.

Apparently its pilot had not noticed the battleship until the barrage of anti-aircraft fire had destroyed the first plane. Not until then did he even know the Idaho existed. Like a bird that had been suddenly startled by the appearance of a hawk, the plane leaped into the air. Shells were still bursting around it. It went up so fast it left the barrage completely behind. Its climb was almost vertical. It rose to about twenty thousand feet, leveled off. Twice it circled the battleship, ignoring the shell bursts, that tried to keep up with it.

Then it turned in the direction from which it had come. It was out of sight in seconds.

There was silence on the bridge of the Idaho.

"Holy cats!" Craig heard an officer mutter. "Somebody is crazy as hell. *We* don't have planes that will fly like that and I know damned good and well they didn't have them a hundred thousand years ago!"

Was Michaelson wrong? Was he talking through his hat when he said the Idaho had been precipitated through a time fault into the remote past? He had said they might be an hundred thousand years in the past, or a million years —he didn't know which. The appearance of the lizard-birds, the great winged dragons of mythology, had seemed to prove that the scientist was correct.

Did these two mysterious planes, of strange shape and design and with the ability to fly at such blinding speed, prove that he was wrong?

Was it possible—the thought stunned Craig—that they had been precipitated into the future?

The winged dragons belonged to the past. The planes, theoretically at least, belonged to the future.

"Something is crazy!" Captain Higgins said. "Go get that scientist," he spoke to one of his aides. "I want to talk to him."

MICHAELSON came to the bridge and listened quietly to what Higgins had to say. His grave face registered no emotion but his eyes were grim.

"I can definitely tell you *two* things," he said at last. "One of them is that we are not in what could be called the future."

"But those two planes were better than anything we have invented!" Captain Higgins insisted. "The airplane was not invented until 1907. This *has* to be the future."

"*Men* invented airplanes in 1907," Michaelson said. Ever so slightly he emphasized the word "*men*."

Higgins stared at him. Slowly, as he realized the implication of what the

scientist had said, his face began to change. "What are you driving at?" he said, his voice a whisper.

Michaelson spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "The Wright brothers invented the lighter-than-air ship early in the twentieth century," he said. "They were the first men to fly a plane, the first men of our race. But how do we know what happened on earth a million years ago, and I can definitely tell you that we are at least a million years in the past? The history that we know fairly well does not cover a span of more than five thousand years. How can we be certain what happened or did not happen on earth millions of years ago?"

The scientist spoke quietly, his voice almost a whisper. "We are before the time of the airplane. Yet we find airplanes? What do you think that might mean?"

"I—" Higgins faltered, his mind flinching away from facing the unknown gulfs of time. He forced his mind to heel. "It means there are people here in this time," he said huskily. "People, or *something*, who know how to make planes."

Michaelson nodded. "That would be my conclusion," he said.

"But that is impossible," Higgins flared. "If there had been civilizations in the past, we would have a record of them. I mean, we would have found their cities, even if the people had disappeared. We would have found traces of their factories, of their buildings—"

"Would we?" Michaelson asked.

"Certainly. Don't you agree with me?"

"Not necessarily," the scientist said. "You are forgetting one important fact —the size of a million years. A million years from now will anyone be able to find New York? Chicago? London? The steel mills of Pittsburgh? I think not. In that length of time, the action of the rain, the frost, and the sun will have completely destroyed every sign that these places once existed. Besides, the continents we now know may have sunk and new ones appeared. How could we locate the ruin of Pittsburgh if the city were at the bottom of the Atlantic? A million years ago there may have been huge cities on earth. Man is not necessarily the first race ever to appear on the planet."

Craig, listening, recognized the logic in what Michaelson had said. There might have been other races on earth! The vanity of men blinded them to that fact, when they thought about it at all. They wanted to believe they were the most important, and the only effort of creation, that the earth had come into being expressly for their benefit. Nature might have other plans.

Michaelson had suggested a logical solution for the dilemma of airplanes and flying dragons existing in the same world.

Craig saw the officers glancing uneasily in the direction from which the planes had come. Off yonder somewhere below the horizon was *something*. They were worried about it. Against the beasts of this time, the Idaho was all-powerful. But how would the Idaho stack up against the *something* that lay below the horizon? Or would the ship be able to escape back through the time fault before the threat of the mysterious planes became greater?

Out around the ship, small boats were planting charges of explosive. One boat was dashing out to the wrecked scouting plane to rescue the pilot.

"We have to see if we can get away from here, at once," Higgins said. "We have to set off those explosives and see if they will force us back through the time fault."

They had to get away from this

world. There was danger here. Planes that flew as fast as the one that had gone streaking off across the sky represented danger.

Higgins ordered the planting of the explosives to proceed at the double-quick.

"I said I could definitely tell you two things," Michaelson spoke again. "One of them was that we are in the past, millions of years in the past." He spoke slowly, his eyes on the busy boats around the ship. "Are you not interested in the second of the two things I said I could tell you?"

"Yes," said Higgins. "What is it?"

The scientist sighed. "It is that we will never be able to return to our own time!"

"What? But—we are planting mines. If the explosion of the Jap bombs sent us through the time fault, maybe a second explosion will send us back through it."

Michaelson shook his head. "I have investigated the mathematics of it," he said. "It is impossible. You might as well call in your boats and save your explosives. The fact is, we are marooned in this time, *forever!*"

Marooned in time, forever! The words rang like bells of doom. Marooned forever. No chance of escape. No hope for escape.

"Are you sure?" Higgins questioned.

"Positive," the scientist answered.

Craig looked at the sea. He lit a cigarette, noting that it was the last one in the package. He drew the smoke into his lungs, feeling the bite of it.

Marooned in time, forever!

CHAPTER IV

Silver on the Sea

NIGHT had come hours ago. Craig stood on the deck, watching the sea and the sky and the stars in the sky. Up overhead the constellations had changed. They were not the familiar star clusters that he knew. Completely blacked out, the Idaho moved very slowly through the darkness. Her speed was kept to almost nothing because the charts of the navigators were useless. The charts had been made in that far future which the battle wagon had quitted forever and they revealed nothing about this sea. There might be a mile of water under the ship. She might be scraping bottom. The navigators were going mad worrying about what might be under the ship. Captain Higgins was going mad worrying not only about what might be under the ship but about what might soon be over it, when the mysterious planes returned. The pilot of the scouting plane had been rescued. He had not lived to tell what he had found.

Craig was aware of a shadow near him but he thought it was one of the crew until the match flared. It was Margy Sharp. She was lighting a cigarette.

A sharp reprimand from an officer caused her to drop the match.

"What's wrong?" she demanded. "Why can't I smoke?"

"Blackout," Craig said.

"Oh, it's *you*," the girl spoke.

"Where have you been?" Craig asked. "I looked around for you but I couldn't find you."

"In the hospital," she said. "Helping out a baffled doctor."

"How is English?" Craig asked.

"English has been dead for hours," she said. "I've been with Mrs. Miller."

"Oh!" How is she?"

"Fine. But the doctor almost went nuts. He said it was the first time in naval history that a baby had been born on a battleship. He seemed to think it violated the rules of etiquette, or some-

thing. It was a girl," she went on, a little breathlessly now, as if talking about babies made her excited. "Mrs. Miller said she was going to name it Margaret, after me. Isn't that nice? She says her husband will be worried to death about her and she wants to use the ship's radio to send him a message. Do you think she could do that?"

"Do I—" Craig choked. "Listen, girl, do you know what has happened?"

The tone of his voice alarmed her. "No," she said quickly. "I don't know. What has happened?"

She had been busy down in the hospital bay, too busy to wonder what was going on up above. Craig told her the whole story. She listened in incredulous amazement. He had to tell it twice before she began to understand it. And then she didn't believe it.

"You're kidding me," she said.

"Sorry," Craig answered. "But I'm not kidding."

"You mean—you actually mean we're back somewhere in the past?"

"Exactly."

"But—but what are we going to do?"

THE big man shrugged. "We're going to wait and see what happens. That's all we can do. Wait and see." There were tones of excitement in his voice.

"You sound pleased about this," she challenged.

"I'm not pleased," he quickly corrected here. "I'm sorry for Mrs. Miller and for Margaret, for you, for Captain Higgins, and the men on the Idaho. But as for myself—well, I'm not sorry. This is the ultimate adventure. We have a new world to explore, new things to see. I know hundreds of men who would give an arm to be dropped back here into this world. I've met them in every mining camp I ever saw, in every trading post on the frontiers of civilization, in every corner of earth. They were misfits, most of them. I'm a misfit, or I was, back in our time. I didn't belong, I didn't fit in. I wasn't a business man, I never would have made a business man. I couldn't have been a lawyer or a clerk or a white-collar worker. But here—well I seem to belong here. This is my time, this is my place in the world." He broke off. "I don't know why I am telling you all this," he said shortly.

She had listened quietly and sympathetically. "You can tell me," she said. "Remember, back in the life-boat, when I told you we were two of a kind? I didn't fit in, either, back home. I belong here too."

She had moved closer to him, in the soft darkness. He could sense her nearness, sense her womanliness. He started to put his arms around her.

"Well," a voice said behind him.

Craig turned. Voronoff stood there. "What do you want?" Craig said.

"From you, I want nothing," Voronoff answered. "I was not speaking to you. I, at least, have not forgotten about the water."

"The water?" Craig said puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"The water that wasn't in the cask we had in the life-boat," Voronoff answered. "The water that you drank in the night when the rest of us were asleep."

"Damn you—" Craig said.

Voronoff walked away. Craig made no attempt to follow him. He had completely forgotten about the water. With an effort, he got his temper under control and turned back to the girl.

She had turned away and was looking at the sea. When Craig spoke, she did not answer. A moment before, a warm magic had been between them. Voronoff's words had changed the warmth to coldness.

THAT night the lookouts on the Idaho were constantly reporting that the ship was being shadowed. Overhead in the darkness were planes, silent planes. The lookout occasionally spotted them against the moon.

The fact that the planes flew silently, like shadows in the night, perturbed the lookouts and their uneasiness was communicated to the crew. No one would have much minded planes that made the proper amount of noise, but ghost planes that made no noise at all were dreadful things. The silent planes scouted the ship, then seemed to disappear. At least they were no longer visible, but whether or not they were still hidden somewhere in the sky, no one knew. They made no attempt to bomb the ship, or to attack it in any way. This seemed ominous.

The Idaho carried four planes of her own. One had been lost. Before dawn, Captain Higgins ordered another catapulted into the sky, to search the surrounding area. This plane went aloft. It was not attacked or molested. The pilot, by radio, reported the presence of a large body of land very near. Navigators, consulting their charts, discovered that this body of land was not on any of their maps.

Dawn, that hour of danger when an attack might reasonably be expected, came. The crew of the Idaho stood by their guns, waiting. No attack came.

The sun rose. Still there was no attack. The ship, moving very slowly, entered an area where the surface of the sea seemed to have turned to silver. This effect was caused by some oily substance that floated on the water, a new phenomenon to officers and men alike.

On the horizon the land mass the pilot of the scouting plane had reported was dimly visible, a range of forested hills sloping upward to mountains in the background, the rim of some mighty continent of the old time. Later, millions of years later, only the tops of these mountains would remain above the sea, to form the thousands of islands of the Pacific.

CRAIG breakfasted below. He came on deck just as the alarm sounded. The crew raced to their stations. He discovered the cause of the alarm.

Overhead, at a height of thirty to thirty-five thousand feet, was a plane. It was shadowing the ship. It made no attempt to attack. Craig went to the bridge. Captain Higgins had been on the bridge all night. He was still there. He greeted Craig wanly.

"We're being watched," Higgins said. "I don't like it."

"Anything we can do about it?"

Higgins squinted upward through his glasses. "Too high for ack-ack. No, there is nothing we can do about it. And I'm not sure we want to do anything about it."

"What do you mean?"

"We're not fighting a war here in *this* time," the captain answered. "We don't want to fight, if we can possibly avoid it."

"It may be a problem to avoid fighting," Craig said. "Remember, they shot down the pilot of your scouting plane."

"I remember," Higgins said grimly.

"Of course, we could surrender," Craig suggested.

"How would you like to go to hell?" Higgins said.

"It was only an idea," Craig grinned. "But I don't like this business. We don't know what we're trying to avoid fighting, or what strength they have, or how they will attack, if they attack."

"I don't like it either," Higgins answered. "But I didn't choose it. Damn them, if they're going to attack, I wish they would get on with it!"

Over the huge ship the tiny plane circled. Every man on the Idaho knew the situation was nasty. They were being watched. There was nothing they could do to stop it. The shadowing plane was above anti-aircraft fire. The warship could not hide from it. There was no protecting destroyer to lay a friendly smoke screen to shield them from the eyes in the sky. Meanwhile, somewhere around them a hidden enemy might be marshalling forces to destroy them.

"Have you tried to contact them?" Craig asked.

"I tried to reach them by radio all last night," Higgins answered. "There was no answer. The radio operators say there are no signals in the air. This, plus the fact that they have not attempted to answer our signals, forces me to the conclusion that they have not discovered radio. Of course they may use wave bands beyond the range of our receivers— Hello! What's that?"

From somewhere near them a shout had sounded.

Leaning over the edge of the bridge, Craig saw a sailor on the lower deck. The man was also leaning over pointing down toward the sea. He shouted again and turned upward toward the bridge. His face was white with terror.

"What is it?" Captain Higgins demanded.

"It's—It's that silver stuff on the surface, sir," the sailor answered. "It's —it's eating the sides of the ship sir. It's eating the ship."

The Idaho was still in the area of the bright substance that floated on the surface of the sea. Captain Higgins raced from the bridge down to the main deck. Craig followed him. By the time they reached the spot where the sailor was standing several other officers had gathered. They were all staring down at the sea.

Craig leaned over the rail, looked down. Horror tightened an iron band around his heart.

AT THE waterline, a great gash had been eaten into the steel hull of the Idaho. The plates of the ship were the best grade of chrome steel, heat-treated and hardened. They were designed to withstand the battering of sixteen-inch shells. The steel in them was the toughest metal that had ever come out of Pittsburgh.

Where the oily, shiny substance touched it, the steel was crumbling away.

"Acid!" Craig heard an officer gasp. "That's what the silver stuff is. Acid! They sprayed it on the sea."

"They plotted our course and set a booby-trap for us."

"That can't be an acid," someone protested. "It is impossible to secure a concentration of acid on the surface of the sea strong enough to eat holes in steel."

"Maybe it's impossible but it sure as hell has happened!"

Each passing wave tossed the oily liquid against the hull of the Idaho. It hissed softly when it struck and promptly began its deadly work. What was happening below the waterline was not visible. Probably no damage was being done there because the acid was on the surface and did not touch the areas below the waterline. But enough damage was being done above the water! Pits two inches deep were already appearing in the steel sides of the ship.

"Full speed ahead!" Captain Higgins ordered.

Their hope was to get out of the area covered by the acid and to get out of it quickly. But—the patch of silver was miles in extent. And there was no way to determine exactly how much

damage had been done to the ship. The line of corrosion extending around the hull might have weakened her so badly that she was unseaworthy.

Captain Higgins took the only possible course. He ordered the ship to make for land.

TWO hours later the Idaho was resting in a natural harbor between low hills. A river emptied into the sea here. Captain Higgins had grown years older as he took the ship into the mouth of the harbor. He had no charts of the place, now way of knowing how much water was available, or whether there were hidden reefs waiting to rip the bottom out of the ship. He took her in blind, the hardest job any ship's master ever has to face.

Like a wounded lion, the Idaho was seeking a place where she could lie up and determine how badly she had been hurt. In entering the harbor she was going into what might easily be a death trap but if she stayed outside, her weakened hull might give away and she might go down with all hands.

Higgins sent his engineers in boats to determine how much damage had been done to the hull. With his officers, he waited on the bridge for the engineers to report. There was none of the acid on the surface of the harbor.

Craig heard the chief engineer report.

"The hull is so weak that the ship may sink at any moment, sir. An effort to move her might crumble the plates. Holes in the sides six to eight inches deep, sir."

The captain's hands on the rail of the bridge tightened until the knuckles showed white.

"Very well," he said. "Beach her."

"Beach her, sir?"

"Yes. If we stay here, we may find more of that acid sprayed on the water, in which case the ship will sink."

The crew began preparations to carry out the orders. The Idaho was done, finished, ended.

High overhead the single watchful plane still circled.

Higgins shook his fist at it. "Damn you—" he said. "Damn you—"

The Idaho was carefully brought into the mouth of the river until she touched bottom. Fortunately the bottom was sandy mud. The ship sighed and settled herself into it like a tired sea monster coming out of the ocean to die. Everyone on board her knew that this was the ship's last resting place. Her steel bones would remain here until they rusted away. As the ship's keel grated on the bottom, Captain Higgins looked like a man who is hearing his own death sentence but his back was stiff as a ramrod and his chin was high.

CHAPTER V

The Ogrum

"EXPLORING parties ashore," Captain Higgins ordered.

"With your permission," Craig said, "I should like to be a member of one of those parties."

"Certainly," the captain said. "I'll do even better than that— I'll put you in charge of one of them."

"Thank you, sir," Craig said. In accordance with the best naval tradition, he kept his voice emotionless, but his heart leaped at the thought. He was going to lead a squad of blue-jackets ashore!

He was assembling his group when Michaelson, wildly excited, came dashing up. "I understand you are taking a squad ashore!" the scientist excitedly panted.

"That's right," Craig answered.

"I want to go along."

"You want to go along?" Craig

glanced toward the nearby shore. Above the swamps bordering the river one of the lizard-birds was flapping. It was carrying in its taloned claws something that looked like a small monkey. Now and then coughing grunts came from the swamp, evidence of the beasts lurking there. "You want to go into *that*?" Craig questioned.

"Certainly," the scientist vigorously answered. "This is the opportunity of a life-time. We shall have a perfect chance to oberve the flora and fauna of this time. We shall see them alive. No other scientist ever had a chance like this."

"You mean you will have a fine chance to be gobbled up," Craig said grimly, nodding toward the shore. "That's jungle country."

"You are taking these men into it," Michaelson protested.

"They volunteered," Craig answered.

"So do I volunteer," Michaelson said.

"All right," Craig said, grinning in spite of himself at the impetuous way this scientist flung himself into what at best could only be a nasty situation. "Get yourself a gun and come along—" He broke off to stare at the second person who was approaching him.

It was Margy Sharp. She went directly to the point. "How about me volunteering too?" she asked.

"Well, I'm damned," Craig said.

"Does that mean I can go?"

"It does not!" Craig said emphatically. "It means I'm astonished that you should have taken such sudden leave of your senses."

"Why can't I go?" she challanged.

"Because you're a girl," he answered. "And because you would be in the way. No sale, Margy. Not today and not any other day if I have anything to say about it. You stay here where you belong."

"You damned men have *all* the fun," the girl said bitterly, turning on her heel. Craig watched her walk directly to Captain Higgins and make the same request and he observed the astonishment of that naval officer. But in spite of his astonishment, the captain was quite able to say "No."

The last he saw of her, she was leaning over the rail watching the small boat put out for shore. He waved at her. She thumbed her nose in reply.

Looking back as they neared the shore, Craig saw she was still standing at the rail. He also heard the boom of the ship's catapult and saw a plane launched into the air. Captain Higgins was sending out a plane to scout the surrounding area. Craig knew what the captain was worried about—the place from which those cursed silent airplanes came.

High in the sky, he could see one of the silent floaters keeping its vigil over the Idaho.

"We'll cross the swamp and reach the hills," Craig directed.

SHOTS roared in the distance as they forced the boat through the pools of stagnant water. Apparently the shots came from the other exploring parties shooting flying lizards or other creatures. Once a flying lizard swooped over their boat but it changed its mind and went on to attack something else. And, as they forced the boat through a clump of reeds and into a clear channel, something monstrous snorted near them. Loud crashes sounded in the swamp tangle.

"It looks as big as an elephant," Craig shouted. "Get your guns ready."

He could see the movement of the reeds as the beast crashed toward them. Small trees were shaking, marking its passage, then it thrust its head out of the tangle not fifty feet from them.

"It's a dinosaur!" Michaelson

shouted. The scientist was wildly excited. "It's a live dinosaur."

"It's going to be a dead one if it comes any closer," Craig said grimly.

"No, don't shoot," the scientist said. "It's one of the herbivorous dinosaurs, a vegetation eater. It won't harm us."

The sailors in the boat were nervously fingering their tommy-guns and staring at the mountain of flesh that was half-hidden by the jungle growth. It, in turn, stared at them. It was bigger than any elephant that ever walked the earth, and Craig, as he estimated the size of the beast, was wondering whether the tommy-guns would stop it if it chose to attack.

"If we have to shoot, aim at the head," he whispered.

In comparison to the rest of the body, the head was small. It would present a difficult target but a hit in the head might stop the beast whereas a hit in the huge body would pass unnoticed. The dinosaur stared at them. Seconds ticked into minutes. It moved its head in a circle, sniffing the air. Michaelson wanted to get out of the boat and swim to shore so he could examine it closely.

"You stay in this boat," Craig said vigorously. "You will probably get a chance to examine all the dinosaurs you want."

Muttering to himself, the scientist subsided.

Slowly, as though it had seen all it wanted to, the dinosaur turned and went back into the swamp. The shaking of the shrubs marked the direction it had taken. Craig breathed a sigh of relief.

"I told you it wasn't dangerous," Michaelson said bitterly. "You should have let me examine it."

"Never mind," Craig said soothingly. "After we get ourselves settled here, you can have a dinosaur for a pet. Push on, men," he said to the crew. "I want to climb one of those hills and take a look around."

REACHING the spot where the boat could pass no farther, they left two men to guard it and pushed ahead on foot. The swamp gave way to rising, rocky ground covered with a thin growth of huge trees. There was a whistle in the air. Looking quickly up, Craig saw a flyng lizard swoop through an opening in the trees and dive headlong at something hidden in the rocks ahead.

A scream sounded as the dragon bird dived to the attack.

There was a human element in the scream.

"That bird is after somebody!" Craig shouted. "Come on."

If he had not known it was impossible, he would have been certain that the scream he had heard had come from the throat of a woman. But there were no women here in this mad world. Dashing forward he climbed to the top of a huge rock—and looked down at an incredible scene.

He was on the lip of a rocky ravine. Across on the other side of the ravine was a hole in the rock, a shallow cave. Crouching in the back of the shallow depression was a woman. She was shielding something with her body.

In front of the shallow cave was—a man. He was not the type of man to grace the pages of a fashion magazine, but in spite of bulging muscles and heavy, uncombed hair, there was a lithe alertness about him that was appealing.

There was something else that was more appealing.

The way he was facing the dragon.

The lizard bird, all claws and fanged mouth and hooked wings, was trying to knock the man down. He was fighting it desperately. His only weapon was

a heavy club. He struck heavily with the club, leaped back out of danger. The bird lunged at him. He hit it across the head and knocked it backward. The bird was on the ground. It lunged again, screaming shrilly. The man struck at it, dodged to one side, hit it again. The bird came back to the attack.

No matter how valiant the defense, there could be only one ending. The dragon was too big, too fierce, too impervious to pain, too hard to kill, to be stopped by a man with a club. It lunged again. The man struck at it, slipped, fell. Hissing with triumph, leathery wings flapping, the lizard bird leaped at him.

Rat-tat-tat-tat— Craig let go with his tommy-gun.

Rat-tat-tat-tat— The other men joined in, pouring a murderous fury of cross-fire down into the ravine. The bird was almost as big as a horse. It was a fierce fighter. It would relinquish a meal when it was dead and not before. One slug would not stop it. Dozens of slugs poured into it, smashed it to a bloody pulp. Even as it died it still tried to reach the man it had attacked.

As suddenly as it had started, the shooting stopped. Craig took the smoking gun from his shoulder. The dragon gave one last convulsive heave and lay still.

The man had scrambled to his feet. The sudden, blasting fury of the gunfire must have shocked him out of his wits. He had been facing death, bravely; and suddenly death had struck down the creature that was attacking him. He stood without moving. In the cave behind him the woman left off her whimpering.

The man was darting glances out of the corners of his eyes, seeking the source from which his sudden deliverance had come. Slowly he turned his head. He saw the sailors on the lip of the ravine across from him.

A look of almost stupefying fear crossed his face. He had faced the dragon with no show of cowardice. Now, seeing his benefactors for the first time, he looked terrified. In the cave behind him the woman had also located the humans. Without moving a muscle, she crouched against the rock wall. Craig had seen wild animals, frightened by the sudden appearance of a beast of prey, act like this. A rabbit, aware of the swoop of a hawk, would be too terrified to move. A lamb, knowing the wolf was near, would crouch trembling waiting for the final snarling leap.

"He's scared of us," Craig whispered. "Don't make any sudden moves."

The man looked up at them.

"Ogrum!" he whispered. "Ogrum—"

VERY slowly he laid the club on the ground beside him. Then he stretched himself face downward beside it in a gesture of obeisance older than human history. Subject races welcomed their conqueror in a manner such as this, slaves knelt before their master in this manner—in the days before men ceased being slaves.

"He must think we're gods," Craig whispered. It was a logical explanation of the man's actions yet it did not completely satisfy him.

"He thinks we are something else," Michaelson said. "He is acting like a person who recognizes a strong enemy. He is mistaking us for somebody else. Come on. I'm going down there."

The scientist was already scrambling down the side of the ravine. Craig followed him. He recognized the correctness of Michaelson's deductions. The man had whispered "Ogrum." Then he had knelt. There could only be one explanation: he thought they

The great beast trampled them into the muck

were somebody else. The thought raised a question in Craig's mind: What could inspire such terrifying fear in this man? What horror walked through these jungles that a man would fear more than he feared a dragon?

Craig looked up at his squad on the bank of the ravine. "Be on your guard," he said.

"Aye, aye, sir," the answer came floating down. It was an order the sailors would not be likely to need. They would be on the alert.

Michaelson was so eager to reach the man that he dashed ahead. When Craig reached him, he was bending over the man. The scientist was wildly excited. "He is human," Michaelson was babbling. "Look for yourself if you don't believe me. See, he has all the characteristics of true man."

The scientist was acting as if he expected Craig to argue the point. The big man didn't. "Of course he's human," he said. "What's so strange about that?"

"You do not understand," Michaelson explained. "He is the dawn man. He belongs to the first race of true humans ever to appear on earth. We have found a dawn man. That is of great scientific importance. See!" The scientist pointed to the club. "He has begun to use tools but he has not yet learned to chip flint. He is pre-stone age, definitely pre-stone age, but he is also definitely human, with the capacity to learn, as is shown by his use of the club. He has already made one of the first great inventions, a club. He has not yet made the second invention, fire, or the third great discovery, how to shape stone. I cannot begin to tell you how important this is."

The scientist was beside himself with excitement. Craig grinned. Science had its thrills as well as adventure. Michaelson was apparently experiencing one of science's great thrills—discovery.

The scientist promptly began to try to communicate with the man. But first he had to win the man's confidence. This he did by talking softly and gently. The man sat up to stare in dazed wonder at the scientist. Back in the shallow cave the woman crouched without moving. Craig saw what she was protecting, a child. This was a family they had saved from the dragon. From fearful eyes the woman watched her lord and master talk to the strangers.

"HIS name is Guru," Michaelson said, indicating the dawn man. "I am able to understand a little of what he says. His language is as yet undifferentiated into complex grammatical forms, hence I can follow his meaning without too much difficulty. He says he has lived here all his life and that many more of his people live near here. He says they live in families. Do you know what that means?" the scientist excitedly challenged Craig.

Craig, unable to get Michaelson to leave the dawn man, had left two men to guard the scientist and had taken the others on a wide scouting trip. He had just returned.

"No, I don't know what that means," he answered.

"It means that Guru and his people have not yet reached the tribal stage in their existence!" the scientist triumphantly pronounced. "They are still in the family stage but they have not yet learned to live together in tribes."

Michaelson sounded as if he thought this discovery was of the utmost importance. Scientifically, it probably was important. But Craig had other things on his mind.

"Ask him who he thought we were when he first saw us," he said. "Ask him why he was so badly scared of us.

Ask him who the Ogrum are."

Craig was talking to the scientist but he was watching Guru. When he mentioned the Ogrum, the dawn man flinched. Fright appeared in his eyes. Michaelson spoke to him, consulting a notebook in which he had already jotted down words that he had learned, and listened carefully to his reply. The scientist turned to Craig.

"Guru says the Ogrum are very bad," he said. "He says they are much fiercer than the *death-that-flies,* by which he means the bird that was attacking him when we came up. He says the Ogrum fly too, and that they are like us, only different. He says he thought we were Ogrum when he first saw us. He says the Ogrum hunt down his people, and capture them, and take them to their city, and there feed them to the monster that eats forever."

"The monster that eats forever!" Craig whistled thoughtfully. "What the devil is that?"

Michaelson repeated Craig's question to Guru. The answer came haltingly, slowly. The scientist turned to Craig. "I am not at all certain what he means. Another definition would be the bright beast that is always hungry. But I do not know what this beast is, and Guru seems unable to tell me. He has never seen it, he says, only heard about it. He is much afraid of the Ogrum."

"I don't blame him," Craig said. "But what are they?"

Guru seemed unable to grasp the meaning of this question. He showed a strange disinclination to discuss the subject. He was so much afraid of the Ogrum that he did not even want to talk about them. And yet—this fact put a worried frown on Craig's forehead—Guru was no coward. They had seen him fearlessly face the flying dragon, the death-that-flew. What was there about the Ogrum that made Guru so terribly afraid of them?

Guru seemed nervous and uneasy. He looked all around the ravine as though he sensed the presence of hidden danger. Suddenly he looked up. A single word fell from his lips.

"Ogrum!" he whispered. *"Ogrum!"*

Craig looked skyward. A single wedge-shaped plane was diving on silent wings through the air. His first thought was that it was diving at them. Then he saw it was passing above them, aiming at some other target. A second plane was following the first, a third was following the second. There was a whole line of them, diving silently on some secret target.

THE second he saw the planes, all question' of the identity of the Ogrum passed from Craig's mind. It was the Ogrum who flew those silent ships, it was the Ogrum who had attacked the Idaho, who had sprayed the strange acid on the sea that had damaged the ship. It was the Ogrum who now were passing overhead intent on some other attack.

"Out of sight, everybody!" Craig shouted. The sailors slipped hastily to cover. Craig joined them. Guru had already leaped back into the mouth of his cave.

"What are those devils after this time?" Michaelson asked.

A second later, they had the answer.

Rolling across the swamps came the sound of a thunderous anti-aircraft barrage from the Idaho.

The Ogrum were moving in to attack the warship, to deliver the last smashing blow against the stranded battle wagon! Like vultures circling a dying animal, they wheeled over the Idaho.

"Come on!" Craig said. "I don't know what we can do to help but we will go and see."

As he hurried out of the ravine he

saw Guru hastily helping his mate carry the child to a higher, safer cave. Guru was hiding. The dawn man might face a flying dragon, but the Ogrum were too much for him. Craig did not blame him for hiding. He led his group hastily toward his boat.

Before they reached the place where they had left the small boat a crash sounded behind them. Turning, they jerked up their guns. In this jungle wilderness, anything might be attacking them. When they saw what was following them, they dropped the muzzles of the weapons.

It was Guru. Waving his club, he had come to join them. He was chattering excitedly.

"He says he has put his wife and little one where they will be safe," Michaelson translated. "He wants to know if we are going to fight the Ogrum."

"Tell him yes," Craig answered.

"Then he says he wants to go along," the scientist interpreted.

For an instant Craig stared at the dawn man. Guru was scared. His fright was obvious. Even thinking about the Ogrum scared him. But if his newfound friends were going to fight the devils of the jungle, he was going with them!

"There," said Craig appreciatively, "beats a fighting heart. Come on, dawn man, you've got what it takes."

With Guru to lead them and point out passages through the swamp, they made speedy time in the boat. Meanwhile, clearly audible but out of sight, the sky was filled with the thunder of guns.

"The ack-ack will knock those planes out of the sky," one of the sailors said.

"I wish I thought so," Craig answered.

"What do you mean?" Michaelson questioned.

"The Ogrum must know we have anti-aircraft defenses," the big man said uneasily. "We shot one of their planes down when they attacked our scouting flier. They know we can and will fight. If they attack us under those circumstances, it means one of two things—either they're crazy or they think they can take us in spite of our ack-ack. For all I know, they may be crazy, but I'm betting they think they can take us. "Sh—" Craig listened.

The anti-aircraft barrage was thinning out. The guns were not firing as furiously as they had at first. Uneasiness showing on their faces, the sailors listened.

"Something's going wrong," one of them muttered.

"Get moving!" Craig barked. He knew too well that something was going wrong. And, as they shoved the boat through the swamp, the guns from the ship began to sound slower and slower until at last only occasional blasts showed they were still being manned.

Then the gun-fire ceased altogether.

"Perhaps we have driven them off," Michaelson suggested.

"Perhaps we haven't!" Craig answered bitterly. "Look."

They were nearing the river. Through open spaces, the harbor was visible. They caught a glimpse of the Idaho.

The planes of the Ogrum were still circling above it.

The Ogrum had not been driven off.

They had won a victory!

CHAPTER VI

The City of the Ogrum

HIDDEN on the shore, Craig and his men watched the looting of the Idaho. The planes of the Ogrum were still wheeling overhead. Dozens had

alighted on the water around the doomed ship and the Ogrum were climbing aboard. Craig saw how the ship had been taken. Gas! Trails of thin white mist still floated around the vessel. The diving planes had sprayed some kind of gas on the ship. It was obviously some kind of vapor different from any known in the far-off Twentieth Century but equally obviously it was devilishly effective. Guru verified the fact that gas had been used.

"White cloud makes sleep, Guru says," Michaelson supplied.

Before the sleep had come, the guns of the Idaho had taken a toll of the attackers, as wrecked planes on the water testified. Craig saw the pilot of one of the planes, obviously wounded, signal to the other Ogrum to help him. His flier was sinking and he was unable to swim. His comrades completely ignored his cries for help. The plane sank and the Ogrum pilot, after vainly attempting to swim, went under too. There were planes near that could have rescued him and certainly some of the Ogrum saw him, but they made no attempt to help.

"Devils!" Craig said huskily. "They're devils. They don't even take care of their own wounded comrades."

"If they treat their own men that way, what will they do to their captives?" Michaelson questioned.

Craig could only stare at him in horror.

"Ask him," he jerked a finger toward Guru," if the gas *kills* the people who inhale it."

The scientist put the question. Guru, squatting on his haunches, answered slowly.

"He says they are only asleep, that after while they will wake up," Michaelson said.

"God!" Craig groaned. "I was afraid of that. Ask him what the Ogrum will do with their captives?"

Again the scientist questioned the dawn man.

"He says the Ogrum will take them to their city and feed them to the white beast that is always hungry."

Craig said nothing. He turned and looked at the Idaho. The skin was drawn tight across his face and knots were bulging at the corners of his jaws. He could see the Ogrum dancing on the decks. They looked something like humans except that their bodies were distorted, out of proportion. One was tall and very skinny. Another was short and fat. A third had one long arm and one short arm. Another had a long body and two very short legs. Just looking at them, he hated them.

"Damn you," he whispered. "Damn you—"

Something touched his arm. He turned and saw that Guru had risen to his feet. The dawn man, a look of sympathy on his face, was awkwardly trying to pat him on the shoulder.

"Guru is trying to tell you that he is sorry," Michaelson said.

"Thanks," Craig said chokingly. "We—we're not licked yet."

In his heart, he knew that he was whistling to keep up his own courage when he said they weren't licked. If the Ogrum could conquer the Idaho, what could a handful of sailors do against them? True, there were several exploring parties ashore, but all of them did not total fifty men.

What chance had fifty men against the might of the Ogrum? Fifty men armed with sub-machine guns when there had been more than a thousand men on the Idaho, armed with anti-aircraft cannons!

FROM the shore, Carig and his companions watched the Guru loot the ship. Oddly, they were not interested

in any of the fittings of the mighty vessel. The loot that interested them was —men! They brought in large, cargo carrying planes, powered by the same weirdly silent motors, moored them in the water beside the ship, then one by one carried the sleep-stricken members of the crew to the side and dumped them into the cargo planes. Craig thought he saw them drop Margy Sharp into one of the planes. He sat silently cursing, fists clenched. Several times the Ogrum missing connections in loading the cargo planes, with the result that the unconscious human fell into the sea. The Ogrum made no attempt to rescue the fallen men but let them float away in the current flowing from the river. Triangular fins tore through the water toward these helpless floaters.

"What the Ogrum miss, the sharks get!" Craig said fiercely. Blood was flowing down his chin from his bitten lips. The sailors with him were white-faced and grimly silent. Michaelson, after watching the scene for a few minutes, turned abruptly and walked a few feet along the shore. They could hear him being sick.

One by one the loaded cargo planes took off, carrying their loads of helpless human freight. The fighter planes buzzed after them. The Idaho was left deserted. Either the Ogrum had not known there were men ashore or were not at present interested in them.

The sun was low in the west before Craig dared to venture back to the Idaho. The other exploring parties, who had been watching from hidden spots along the shore, joined him. Silently the little boats moved toward the bulk of the deserted battle wagon.

THE gas had long since disappeared from the ship. By sun-down, Craig knew the whole story.

About two hundred men, caught in the lower parts of the ship by the attack and protected from the full effects of the gas by doors, were reviving. Most of them were too deathly sick to be of any immediate use. Mrs. Miller and her baby had been found hidden in the hospital bay, safe but sick.

Captain Higgins had not been found.

Margy Sharp had not been found.

One man had been dragged, trembling, from the lowest hold where he had taken refuge —Voronoff.

On the main deck, Craig held a conference with Michaelson and Guru. The answers to the questions he asked left him with a grim look on his face. He called the sailors together.

"I have been talking to Guru," he said. "Guru tells me that the city of the Ogrum is not far from here. He says we can reach it tonight, if we go by land, and if we use the big logs that float—by which he means our power boats—we can reach it by midnight."

He paused and looked expectantly at the sailors. A little stir ran through them. They instantly grasped what he was driving at.

"Moreover," he continued, "Guru tells me that the city is usually unguarded, that the Ogrum do not bother to post sentries."

Craig watched the men closely. There was hard, bitter resentment on their faces. They had seen their comrades carted away like so many sticks of wood to some unguessed fate. All they wanted was a chance to rescue their friends, or failing in that, to avenge them.

Craig wasted few words. "I am going to the city of the Ogrum," he said. "All of you who want to go with me, step forward."

The fierce shout that answered him told him all he wanted to know. The blue-jackets were with him. Only one man failed to step forward. It was Voronoff. Craig eyed him.

"What about you, Voronoff?" he said.

"Don't be a damned fool!" Voronoff spat out the words. "We don't have a chance."

"No?"

"No! The Ogrum have planes and gas and everything else. If we jump them, they'll mow us down."

"What would you recommend that we do?" Craig asked. His voice was soft and there was a worried expression on his face. He looked like a man who is faced with a tough problem and is weighing all the possibilities before deciding what to do.

"There is only one thing to do," Voronoff snapped. "Get to hell away from here as fast as we can. Hide in the jungle. Maybe the Ogrum don't know there are any of us left alive. If we jump them, they'll know we're alive and they'll clean us out."

"Hmmm," Craig said thoughtfully. "You've probably got something there. But what about the men the Ogrum have captured?"

Voronoff shrugged indifferently. "They're done for," he said. "We can't help what happens to them."

A LOW growl came from the mass of sailors as Voronoff spoke.

"I suppose we really can't help what happens to them," Craig said. "But I, for one am going to try to help it. We need every able-bodied man we have. That includes you, Voronoff. Are you going with us or aren't you?"

Craig's voice was still soft and pleasant. Voronoff completely misinterpreted it.

"Include me out!" he snapped. "I'm not going."

"No?"

"No! You can't make me volunteer if I don't want to."

"But we need you, Voronoff," Craig pleaded. "We need all the strength we can muster."

"You can go to hell!" Voronoff said sullenly.

"You won't go?"

"I won't go!"

Craig glanced over the side of the ship. Dusk had already fallen but there was still enough light for him to see the triangular fins cutting the surface. He nodded toward the water. "Either you go with us, Voronoff," he said evenly, "Or I, personally, am going to throw you overboard."

Voronoff looked like a man who did not believe his own ears. A low growl of approval came from the sailors. They remembered how they had found this man hiding in the lowest depths of the ship when they had come aboard. While their kidnapped comrades had fought, he had gone to hide.

"You—you don't mean it," Voronoff whispered.

"I never meant anything more," Craig answered. "We can't have any slackers here. Either you go with us or you go overboard and take your chances of swimming ashore."

His voice was hard and flat and there was not the slightest trace of sympathy in it. There was no mistaking his meaning. Voronoff turned pale. He looked quickly around as though seeking a place to hide.

"You've got no hole to pull in after you now," Craig said. "What is your answer."

Voronoff gulped. "I'll—I'll go with you," he said.

"Good," Craig said. He gave swift orders for the preparation of the attacking party. The sailors scurried to do his bidding. He was aware that Michaelson was plucking at his sleeve.

"Weren't you being rather hard on him?" the scientist questioned.

"Maybe," Craig answered. "The truth is, I don't like him. There is

something furtive about him. He impresses me as being pretty much of a rat. Besides, we need every man we can get."

"I know we do," Michaelson said slowly. "But would you honestly have thrown him overboard if he had refused to go?"

Craig shrugged. "Don't ask me such questions. I don't know the answers. Maybe I would and maybe I wouldn't."

"I see," the scientist smiled. "You're a hard man, Craig. All I can say is that in this situation we need a hard man and I'm glad we have you to lead us."

"Thank you," Craig said.

HOURS later Craig stood on the side of a mountain looking down at an incredible scene. Guru, by devious paths know only to the dawn man, had guided them here. Below them lay the city of the Ogrum.

The city was located on the edge of a huge, circular bay that had apparently at some time in the remote past been the crater of a large volcano. To the east where the walls of the volcano had crumbled down was a vast swamp, a favorite feeding ground for the dinosaurs. Hundreds of the great beasts could be heard screaming and fighting in the swamp.

The city itself held Craig's eyes.

He had seen the Ogrum in airplanes, he had seen them use gas, both of which meant an advanced civilization, with a great knowledge of technology. He had expected to find a city bright with lights, numbering hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, with large factories, broad streets, and —since they used planes— landing fields.

None of these things was visible. The city of the Ogrum was unlighted. There were no wide streets, no factories in sight. There was only one large building in the city, and the buildings which apparently served as homes for the Ogrum were little better than crude huts. There was a brilliant full moon overhead, clearly revealing the whole scene.

"It's not possible!" Craig whispered to Michaelson. "This can't be the city of the Ogrum. Guru brought us to the wrong place."

The scientist questioned Guru. Craig could hear the dawn man's replies.

"Guru says this is the right place," Michaelson spoke. "He says this is the city of the Ogrum, that there is no other city."

"But with the exception of that temple, this place is a dump!" Craig protested. "I have seen Papuan headhunters who had built more pretentious cities than this. The Ogrum have planes. You can't build planes without a complex industrial system."

"It is certainly strange," the scientist said musingly. "But Guru insists this is the place and I am inclined to believe him. You will note also that the city below us is not laid out in streets and I see no evidence of a lighting system."

"Maybe they've got a black-out on," a sailor suggested.

Guru, consulted on this point, said no, the city of the Ogrum was always dark at night. Guru had a great deal of difficulty in understanding what was meant by light, but once he grasped the idea, he insisted the Ogrum never used lights.

"Well, it's a damned mystery," Craig said. "And I'm going down there and find out about it. Guru, come with me."

Craig had spent the hours in the boats trying to grasp the language of the dawn-man. He still did not understand Guru as well as Michaelson did but he could understand enough for his purpose.

"Just the two of you going down there?" Michaelson questioned.

"Yes. Any more would only increase the chances of discovery. We've got to know the lay of the land and we've got to have some idea of what we will meet down there before we attempt a rescue. We probably will not be able to make an attack before tomorrow night anyhow."

After disposing his force and ordering them to get as much rest as possible, Craig and Guru started down to the city of the Ogrum. Michaelson had to be restrained from accompanying them.

"You stay here," Craig bluntly told the scientist. "You're not as young as I am and you need a rest."

Overhead was a broad tropic moon. There was no wind. From the great swamp came the only sound that broke the silence of the night, the scream of the dinosaurs, the roaring of the great lions of this time. Below lay the strange city of the Ogrum.

CRAIG felt the weirdness of the scene as he and Guru started down the side of the mountain. What kind of creatures were the Ogrum? What secret lay behind their existence? They had left no mark on history as he knew it. So far as the human race knew, the Ogrum had never existed. And yet—the sudden thought was startling—there was a word in the English language that came close to describing these creatures—ogre! Ogre and Ogrum were very similar. Were these the original ogres, those mythological monsters who devoured human beings? Had the Ogrum, known, feared, and named by the dawn men, come down through legends as ogres?

The thought sent a shivery feeling up Craig's spine. Was he going down into a city of monsters? Were Stinky Higgins and Margy Sharp and hundred of men from the Idaho held as prisoners by ogres? What horrible secret was hidden down there in that silent city?

They reached the edge of the city. It was larger than Craig had thought. Hundreds, possibly thousands of rude huts, were hidden in the jungle growth. The place smelled bad. Apparently no effort at sanitation had ever been made. A nauseous stench arose from the ground. Craig wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"Filth!" he muttered. "This place needs nothing so much as it needs burning to the ground. Where Ogrum, Guru?" he said, turning to the dawn man.

"Ogrum sleep," Guru answered. "In little caves," he said, nodding toward the huts. "Ogrum sleep."

"Where prisoners?" Craig asked. He had to rephrase the question and repeat it several times before the dawn man understood.

"In big cave," Guru said, understanding at last.

"Where big cave?" Craig asked.

"Big rock cave," Guru answered, pointing toward the large stone temple that stood in the center of the city.

"Then that is where we are going," Craig said. "Come on."

Guru hung back. Craig sensed the dawn man's fear. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Monster that is always hungry in big cave," Guru answered.

"Ah," Craig said. The monster that is always hungry! The bright beast that eats forever! A shiver passed through him as he remembered how Guru had described whatever was in the cave. "What is the monster?" he questioned.

But Guru either did not understand or could not explain, and Craig was left with no knowledge of the nature of the monster. However he could guess that the Ogrum regarded the thing in the

temple as a god and offered sacrifices to it, an impression which Guru confirmed.

"Tomorrow when sun goes," Guru said. "Ogrum feed one man to bright beast that is always hungry. Next day when sun goes feed beast again. Keep up until no one left to feed. Then go hunt more people."

Craig recognized the performance as an incredibly ancient ritual of sacrifice to ensure the return of the sun. The Ogrum seemingly had no real knowledge of the universe. Each night when the sun went down they were not sure that it would rise again. To make certain the bright light in the sky would return again, they offered a sacrifice to it.

"What do they do when they run out of captives?" he asked.

"Catch Ogrum, feed him to beast," the dawn man answered.

When they ran out of captives, the Ogrum sacrificed their own people!

"Well, we've still got to find out what is in that temple and where our people are being held," Craig said grimly. "If Guru is afraid, Guru may stay here. I will go alone."

Guru was afraid. There was no doubt about that. Craig did not criticize the dawn man for being afraid. He regarded it as evidence of good, sound sense. But, afraid or not, Guru went with him. Slipping like a pair of ghosts through the rough paths that served as streets, they entered the silent city. Guru was as noiseless as a shadow, and Craig, every sense alert, moved as quietly as an Indian. The big American knew that from any of the huts an Ogrum might emerge at any moment.

THEY reached the temple unobserved.

It was a bigger building than had been apparent from the mountain above. Unlike the huts, it was constructed of stone. Roughly circular in shape, a line of columns circled the outer edge. The construction was crude. The Ogrum either had not yet invented the arch or scorned to use it. Numerous holes big enough for a man to enter standing erect, but not much bigger, served as entrances. The holes were without doors, another invention the Ogrum apparently had not yet made, and Craig was again struck by the strangely warped development of this race that knew how to build airplanes and to use poison gas but still did not know how to build arches.

Unlike the city, the temple was guarded. Yellow-robed, shaven-headed sentries paced around the building keeping inside the circles of the columns.

"Friends of the bright beast that is always hungry," Guru called them. Craig decided they were priests, temple guards. He saw they were armed with spears and swords. In addition each guard carried a pouch of small. round objects that looked like grenades.

"Are those things *grenades?*" Craig whispered. But Guru had never heard of grenades. He did not understand. Nor could Craig make him understand.

Through the small dark holes that served as entrances to the temple occasional flashes of light could be seen. The light was dull, like the fitful glow from a campfire that has almost burned out.

"What is that?" Craig asked.

But Guru either did not know or, for some superstitious reason, refused to talk.

"I'm going into that temple," Craig decided. "You stay here and wait for me."

This time Guru did not insist on going along and Craig realized that the dawn man was desperately afraid of something within the temple. Craig,

waiting until one of the pacing sentries had passed, darted into the nearest opening.

He knew, as he slid into the building, that there was an excellent chance he would never come out, but he had to go in. He had to know what was in there, so he could plan how to defeat it. He had to know where the men of the Idaho were held prisoner and how well they were guarded and if it was possible to organize a way for them to escape. Finally, he had to know the nature of the bright beast that was always hungry, the god of the Ogrum.

What was the monster that was always hungry? Some black leering idol on whose altar was daily sacrificed a living victim? Or was it something else, some real monster that the Ogrum believed to be divine?

Guided by the fitful flickering of light ahead of him, Craig slipped along what was in effect an artificial tunnel. He reached the end of the tunnel, and stopped, appalled at what he saw.

The temple was built like a gigantic amphitheater, like some large bowl in which athletic contests were held. Circling downward in ordered rows were tier on tier of rough stone steps. Down below him, in a huge cup that apparently rose from the solid foundation of the mountain itself was—*a seething mass of white-hot bubbling lava!*

THE city of the Ogrum was located in the crater of a supposedly extinct volcano. The volcano was not extinct. It was merely inactive. Fires still seethed in its heart, and the white-hot lava, held in balance by some subterranean arrangement of pressures, bubbled up here, like a geyser that never overflows and never subsides.

This bowl of lava, rising from the volcano beneath, was what Guru called the white beast that was always hungry. It was the god of the Ogrum. In a flash Craig saw why they worshipped it and why they fed human sacrifices to it. It was bright and hot like the sun. Therefore, by the laws of sympathetic magic, a sacrifice offered to the lava was the same as a sacrifice offered to the sun. The Ogrum, creatures of the dawn world, in spite of their planes and their poison gas, had no real knowledge of science, of the laws of cause and effect. The Ogrum thought that they could assure the return of the warming and life-giving sun by offering a living sacrifice to this bubbling lava!

If their reasoning was erroneous and false, it was nonetheless hideous and real for all that. For they would certainly offer in sacrifice, here, every man taken from the Idaho, unless they were prevented by force.

Across the arena he could see a larger opening closed by a grill of wooden poles. The flickering light from the pool of bubbling lava enabled him to see faces behind the grill—the prisoners. Involuntarily he started toward them. Then he saw the company of shaven-headed yellow clad guards standing beside the enclosure.

The Ogrum were on watch!

Studying the situation, Craig could see no way by which he could effect the release of the men. He had a handful of sailors to help him. There were thousands of the Ogrum. The Ogrum had planes and if they did not have firearms, they certainly had other weapons.

"Surprise!" Craig thought. "We've got to take them by surprise, divert them long enough to release our men. Then—" He cursed softly. Presuming a sudden surprise attack enabled them to release the prisoners? What would happen then?

"They'll hit up with planes!" Craig cursed. "They'll gas us and spray acid on us, and even if we manage to get

away from here, they will follow us through the air." His eyes narrowed. "Which means that we have got to blow up their hangar, destroy their planes, first of all. Then—"

A plan was maturing in his mind. He slipped out of the temple, watched his chances and darted across the open space when no sentry was near, rejoined Guru.

The dawn man was frantic with excitement. "See monster?" he questioned.

"There is no monster," Craig said grimly. "Guru, where cave where Ogrum keep riding birds?"

To Guru, the planes were merely large birds that the Ogrum rode. Craig was asking the dawn man where the hangar was located. Guru led him around the temple, pointed to a projecting wing. "Birds kept there," he said.

The hangar was open. In line with their ignorance of doors, the Ogrum had never devised a method of closing the entrance of the building where they kept—and no doubt built—their planes. An open space leading down to the edge of the bay apparently was the runway where the planes landed. Inside the hangar Craig could glimpse the strange airships of the Ogrum. Except for the regular sentries that circled the whole immense temple, the hangar was unguarded.

"TWENTY men with grenades will hit the hangar first!" Craig thought. "They'll smash the planes and then they will appear to retreat. The Ogrum will follow. Meanwhile across the city, another twenty men will suddenly appear and start firing the thatch huts. The Ogrum will be confused. Before they can organize themselves, I'll take a hundred men and hit the temple. By God, it will work!

"Then," Craig thought, "we'll die one at a time as we try to make our getaway. The Ogrum, even without planes, will hunt us through the jungle forever." He paused, seeking a solution to that difficulty. To free the prisoners only to have everybody perish from the relentless attack of the Ogrum would be no gain.

"The only way to keep the Ogrum from pursuing us is to destroy them—utterly!" Craig thought grimly. He had no qualms about destroying the Ogrum, if he could. The only problem was how! He had not enough men and not enough strength to meet them in open battle. Yet they had to be destroyed.

"Return to others," he told Guru.

The dawn man returned by a different route, passing through the other edge of the city of the Ogrum. Here they found a heavy stone wall, like the retaining dike of a river.

"Why wall, Guru?" Craig questioned.

"Keep earth-shakers out of Ogrum squatting place," the dawn man answered. "Earth-shakers" was Guru's name for the dinosaurs and "squatting place" was his word for city. Beyond the wall was the vast swamp. The Ogrum had erected the wall to keep the dinosaurs out of their city.

"Well, I'm damned," said Craig thoughtfully. "I wonder. Hurry, Guru. Must get back before sun rise."

At a swift trot, the dawn man led him up the mountain.

"THIS is what we're going to do," Craig said excitedly to Michaelson. The sailors, listening closely, squatted around him in the darkness. Dawn was not far off. Already the sky in the east was beginning to turn gray.

Swiftly he outlined his plan of attack, submitted it to the scientist. "I

am no military strategist," Michaelson said slowly. "I am not competent to criticize your suggestions."

"I am," a voice spoke. "I've studied military strategy. Your plan hasn't got a chance in a thousand to succeed. You are just getting us all killed for nothing."

It was Voronoff who spoke.

"That may be true," Craig admitted. "If you have a better plan, I'm willing to listen."

"I've told you all along the only thing to do is to clear out of here as fast as we can."

"That is the one thing we're not going to do," Craig said icily. "If you have nothing constructive to offer, keep your damned mouth shut."

Voronoff sullenly walked away.

Craig selected a group to charge the hangar where the planes were kept, a second group to provide a diversionary attack across the city, and a third group to hit the temple and release the prisoners. The attack was to start just after darkness fell the next night. At that time, so Guru said, all the Ogrum would be gathered in the temple to watch the sacrifice.

"And after that," Michaelson said slowly. "What is to happen?"

"Ah," said Craig. "There is the heart of the affair. What happens next will determine whether any of us ever get out of here alive. And," he looked steadily at the scientist, "that is where you come in."

"I? What am I to do?"

"You and Guru are going to take a dozen men and round up as many of Guru's people as you can find. Here is what you and Guru are going to do."

In great detail Craig outlined the part the scientist and the dawn man were to play in the attack on the Ogrum. They made an odd pair. Michaelson, almost a physical weakling but possessed of one of the keenest minds of the Twentieth Century; Guru, a splendidly muscled giant but almost a child mentally.

"Do—do you think our part in the attack will really work?" the scientist hesitantly asked.

"It's got to work," Craig said bluntly. "If it doesn't work, we are all dead men."

CHAPTER VII

The Attack

AT DUSK a drum began to boom in the temple of the Ogrum. The sun was just on the edge of the horizon. It hung in the sky as if it hesitated to take the plunge below the rim of the world. Crouched hidden on the mountainside as near the city as he dared take his men, Craig could see the Ogrum, at the signal of the drum, start hurrying toward the temple as if they were eagerly anticipating the hellish sacrifice soon to take place.

To one side, beyond the notch in the mountains, was the swamp where the dinosaurs fed. Already the sound of the great beasts fighting and screaming could be heard.

All day long the Americans had remained in hiding near the city. Fortunately none of the Ogrum had ventured to climb the mountain. Craig had spent the day mercilessly rehearsing his men in the part they were to play until they were perfect in their parts, or as perfect as they could become in the short time available. The whole plan of attack depended on split-second timing. If everything worked right, if everybody did his job at the proper time, there was a chance that the attack would be successful. If anything went wrong—Craig preferred not to think about that. Around him, he could feel

a tenseness creep over his men as the zero hour approached.

The Ogrum, as if driven by the quickening beat of the drum, disappeared within the temple.

The sun, making up its mind at last, plunged below the line of the sky.

Zero hour!

Craig could not see them but he knew that men had leaped from hiding and were running toward the projecting wing of the temple that formed the plane hangar. His fingers gripped the stock of the tommy-gun so tightly the knuckles showed white. They had to get that hangar, first. The planes had to be destroyed. Several times during the day he had seen planes take off. All had returned by night.

The vultures were in their nest.

Boom, boom-boom, BOOM, boom.

Craig almost sobbed at the sound. Grenades exploding! Grenades flung into the hangar by the attacking group. Grenades blasting among the mystery planes of the Ogrum!

Boom, boom, boom - boom - boom! Grenades exploding like a chain of giant firecrackers. In the hot darkness Craig caught glimpses of flashes of light as the grenades detonated.

Boom, boom, boom, boom-boom!

The flat sullen thuds echoed up the side of the mountain. From the darkness where the sailors crouched a low cheer arose. The men there in the night knew the meaning of those explosions.

Craig held his breath, waiting. The attack was on. Now, no matter what happened, it was too late to withdraw. Now it was kill or be killed, fight or be struck down, destroy or be destroyed. With the knowledge of the savage sacrifice about to take place within the temple, there was no question of the urge of the men to destroy. The Ogrum were beyond the meaning of mercy. Blast them, mow them down, kill them, destroy them utterly!

Craig waited. Tommy-guns chattered in the darkness. Grenades thundered. Then he saw what he had been waiting for. A tongue of flame licked out of the hangar.

Fire in the nest of the vultures!

The flames grew in violence.

"Withdraw!" Craig said huskily. "Get back. Draw them away with you."

He was talking to himself. The men attacking the hangar could not hear him. Their retreat was the next phase of the attack. Retreat and draw the Ogrum after them.

THEY began to retreat. Flames were roaring from the hangar. It was constructed of stone and the walls would not burn. Leaping tongues of fire poured out of the open door.

For a few minutes after the attack began, the drum-beat continued from the temple. The instant the first explosion had sounded, the drum-beat had faltered. Then it had caught itself and continued. But the continued explosions were unsteadying the hand of the drummer.

The drum stopped beating. The Ogrum poured from the temple. The moon had not yet risen. The burning hangar provided the only illumination. By its light, Craig could see streams of startled beast-men rushing from every entrance.

For a few minutes, they milled in confusion. Something had happened that was not on their schedule. They did not in the least understand the explosions they had heard and they could not grasp what had happened to their hangar.

Eventually they seemed to understand that they had been attacked and that the enemy was retreating. Stabbing flashes of fire from the sub-ma-

chine guns showed where the enemy was retreating.

Angry Ogrum charged the enemy.

Simultaneously, across the city, puffs of light began to appear. Spots of dancing illumination leaped from thatched hut to thatched hut, leaving behind them bright knots of light.

The knots of light grew. They spread. The spots of dancing illumination ran on ahead of them, leaving new knots of light.

On the far side of the city the sky grew bright.

Masses of Ogrum, bewildered by this new spectacle, paused in confusion. Their city was on fire. They did not understand it. They began to hurry toward the fire.

"Phases one and two of the attack are now complete," Craig said to his waiting men. "The third phase begins. Come on. It's our turn now."

The attack on the hangar, the subsequent retreat, and the firing of the city had been carried out perfectly. On the far side of the city the torch squad was still firing the thatched huts. This squad was beginning to withdraw also, pulling the Ogrum after them.

"The attack is a success!" Craig thought exultantly. "We've burned their planes and set their city on fire. Before they know what has happened, we will have rescued the prisoners. We've won!" The thought was burning in his mind. "We've won! Stinky and Margy and the lads from the Idaho will be free again!"

With him at their head, the sailors formed a wedge that drove straight at that part of the temple where the prisoners were held. To effect a rescue, they would have to enter the heart of the big building.

The old Roman phalanx, that fearsome mass of men that struck such terror to the hearts of the barbarians, must have looked something like the wedge of men that drove through the Ogrum city. The Romans were armed with spears, swords and shields whereas the sailors carried tommy-guns and grenades, but the effect was the same—a hard-driving body of men that stops at nothing.

The Ogrum were not expecting this charge. They were busy trying to put out the fires raging in their city. Meeting no organized opposition of any kind, and smashing down the Ogrum who accidentally got in their way, the sailors drove straight to the temple—and into it! Like a perfectly trained team executing a long-practiced maneuver, a strong rear guard slipped into place at the entrance. Craig, driving into the temple, was not going to leave his rear unprotected, to leave his line of retreat open to the chance of being cut.

IN THE vast arena there was a handful of yellow-clad guards surrounding the pool of boiling lava. All the other Ogrum had left the temple.

"Blast them!" Craig grimly ordered.

Machine guns thundered in what was probably the first temple of the sun ever built on earth! Hot lead screamed down at the guards around the lava pool. When the sailors saw the human, bound, ready to be offered as a living sacrifice to the hideous white beast that was always hungry, the priests of the temple lost what little chance they ever had of being taken alive.

The sacrifice had been prepared. The sailors had arrived at the last possible moment.

Two minutes after the sailors had entered the temple, there was not a yellow-clad priest left alive in the vast open arena in the center of the building. Craig was knocking bars from

the cage where the prisoners were penned. Captain Stinky Higgins was standing behind those bars. Margy Sharp was standing beside the captain. Higgins had a strange look on his face.

"By the Lord, Craig—" was all he said when the bars went down. Craig felt his knuckles pop as the captain shook his hand.

The girl's face was paste white but she had her nerves under control. "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" she said, looking at Craig. Then, as silently as a falling shadow, she collapsed.

"No, no, she's all right," Higgins said, in answer to Craig's frantic questions. "She has only fainted. She—all of us—have been through hell. Those damned beasts came in here and grabbed one of the men. We watched them—get ready to toss him into that pool of lava. Craig, how did you get here?"

Captain Higgins was dazed. Behind him the captives were pouring out of their prison cell.

"No time to talk," Craig said hastily. "We've got to get to hell out of here. Each of us brought an extra gun and as many grenades as we could carry. We'll have to fight our way back to the mountains—"

Already the sailors were tossing guns to their comrades who had been held prisoner. The look on the men's faces as they eagerly grabbed the weapons boded no good for any Ogrum who tried to stop them from escaping. Meanwhile Craig and Higgins revived Margy Sharp. The man who had been prepared for the Ogrum sacrifice was released.

"Everybody out!" Craig yelled.

In a long line the sailors trotted toward the passage through the temple that led to the exit. Once outside, they would reform their phalanx and fight their way through any opposition that might develop. No sound had come from the rear-guard they had left at the exit, proving that the Ogrum had not yet discovered that their prisoners had been released.

"We've won!" Craig said huskily. "We've tricked those devils and beaten them to the punch."

"You've worked a miracle," Captain Higgins said. "If we were back home, you would get a Congressional Medal for this."

"Thanks!" the big man grinned. Then the grin vanished from his face. "What's that?" he said sharply.

From the passage ahead of them came the metallic rattle of machine gun fire.

"It's the rear guard at the exit!" a sailor said. "They're shooting at something."

CRAIG ordered the file to halt and he and Higgins slipped forward to the exit. Through the hole that served as a doorway came a dull glow of light. The guard had taken refuge in the passage itself. An ensign came stumbling down the passage.

"It's a trap!" he shouted. "The whole place is surrounded. There are thousands of Ogrum out there. They deliberately let us enter the temple, then they closed up behind us."

"Impossible!" Craig whispered.

"So help me, it's the truth," the ensign insisted. "They deliberately trapped us. They must have known all along what we were going to try. They let us try it. We're caught, like rats in a trap."

There was no mistaking the implication of the man's words. Although he didn't say it, his tone indicated that Craig had led them into the worst possible booby-trap.

The machine guns were still firing. Dimly audible from outside came a

chorus of shouting—the battle cries of the Ogrum. Craig slipped forward to the entrance, looked out. His heart climbed up into his throat.

The temple was completely surrounded. Or, as far as he could see, it was surrounded. From the number of Ogrum he could see in front, he did not doubt that the whole structure was circled. The Ogrum had stopped fighting the fires. It became apparent that they had never made any real effort to fight them but had only pretended to extinguish the blazes, meanwhile waiting for Craig to lead his group into the temple.

It *was* a trap.

But how had the Ogrum been able to set such a trap? Had they known all the time of the presence of the humans on the mountain above them? They had known something. Otherwise they would not have been able to set the trap. How had they learned of the attack? How had they known the exact way the attack would come?

"Yah!" a voice shrilled from outside. "How do you like it now, you big fat-head?"

Voronoff's voice! Voronoff was out there! Craig's first dazed thought was that Voronoff's presence outside, among the Ogrum, was impossible. He tried to remember when he had last seen the man. He hadn't seen Voronoff all day! Voronoff had not been a member of his group but he had assumed the man had attached himself to some other group!

Voronoff had not attached himself to some other group. Voronoff had come secretly to the Ogrum. It was Voronoff who, as far as he knew them, had revealed the plans of the attack to the Ogrum. Voronoff was a traitor!

"You wouldn't believe me when I said you were just getting us all killed!" Voronoff exulted. "I wasn't going to get myself killed with you fools. I told the Ogrum what you were planning. They're going to make me a chief."

In a flash Craig saw why phase one and phase two of the attack had gone off so smoothly. The Ogrum had permitted the smashing of the hangar. What were a few planes? They could build more. What were a few grass huts? They could erect a thousand others. The destruction of the planes and the burning of part of their city was a small price to pay if they could trap all the remaining men of the Idaho.

Craig cursed himself. He had not thought of the possibility of anyone turning traitor. He should have thought of it. Back there in the life-boat, while he was asleep, someone had stolen water. Voronoff was the only person who would have stooped to steal water when water meant life, and the only person clever enough to accuse Craig of the crime he, himself, had committed.

"I should have choked that dog to death!" Craig said bitterly. "I should have thrown him to the sharks."

Captain Higgins had come forward and sized up the situation. "No use crying over spilt milk," he said to Craig. "I don't blame you for not thinking of a traitor and I think no one else will blame you. The question is, what are we going to do?"

"What do you want?" Craig shouted.

"The Ogrum demand unconditional surrender!" the answer came. "They say, if you will surrender, that half of you will have to be offered to the gods, but that the lives of the rest will be spared. Who shall be sacrified and who shall be spared will be determined by lot. If you don't surrender all of you will be taken prisoner and offered as sacrifices. You have five minutes to meet our demands."

VORONOFF'S voice went into silence. Craig, tommy-gun ready,

strained to see the man. Voronoff was hidden. He was not likely to offer himself as a target.

"What are you going to do?" Captain Higgins asked. Tactfully, since Craig had planned and executed the rescue attempt, Higgins was making no effort to exert his own authority. "If I understand correctly, they offer half of us a chance to live, if we surrender."

"I don't believe they will keep any promise they make," Craig said slowly. "I think they are trying to trick us into surrendering. However I might be wrong. I am willing to put it to a vote. What do you say: Shall we surrender or shall we fight?"

The narrow passage was full of sailors who had overheard everything that had been said. There was a moment of silence. Then a gruff voice growled.

"I say fight!"

A chorus instantly answered the first voice.

"Fight the devils!"

"They won't ever give us a chance if we surrender."

"Fight our way out of here."

Captain Higgins listened. "They're good boys," he said, a suspicious quaver in his voice.

"All right," Craig said. "We fight. This temple is almost a fortress. In here, we can hold them off indefinitely. They don't have artillery, so they can't blast us out, and their planes have been destroyed, so they can't bomb us. We'll hold here until we have a chance to escape."

In the back of his mind was the thought that they *did* have a chance to escape. After all, phase four of the attack had not yet gone into operation. Phase four was due to start any minute now.

"To the roof!" he ordered.

By the time the five minutes of grace were up everybody was on the flat roof of the temple. The moon was just rising. It looked like a gigantic conflagration on the horizon.

"Time is up!" Voronoff yelled, from some place of concealment. "What did you decide."

"We decided you could go to hell!" Craig answered. "If you want us, you've got to come and get us."

Hiding around the temple thousands of the Ogrum could be vaguely glimpsed. Captain Higgins surveyed the scene. "We command all approaches to the building," he said. "If they try to charge us, it will be slaughter. We've still got a chance, Craig."

"You're damned right we have!" the big man answered.

"Except," the captain continued thoughtfully, "for ammunition, food, and water, we're all right."

"If we're not out of here by the time our ammunition runs out, we'll never escape," Craig answered. "However, we'll be out of here in an hour."

"I hope you know what you're talking about," was Higgins' only comment.

The Ogrum were making no attempt to attack. Craig circled the roof of the temple, seeing that sub-machine guns covered all approaches. A wind, moving from the direction of the swamp, brought with it the sound of the dinosaurs. The scene was like a setting from some fantastic movie—a full moon burning like a huge fire on the horizon, incredible beasts screaming in the night, a group of embattled humans on the roof of a temple as old as time.

"We've got them!" Craig thought. "They can't get to us and they don't dare attack. If they wait an hour—"

IN SOME hidden spot outside the temple something went *plunk*. The sound was not sharp enough to be called an explosion. It was a plunk, like a

rock falling in a rain barrel.

A small round object arched slowly through the air and hit on the roof of the temple. It also went *plunk*. No explosion. Just a *plunk*. A cloud of white smoke puffed out.

"What the devil is that?" Craig thought uncertainly. "Are they throwing grenades at us? Was the first grenade a dud?"

He started toward the grenade. A whiff of the smoke stung his nostrils, sent a warning bell clattering wildly in his brain.

"Gas!" he yelled. "They're throwing gas grenades at us. Stay away from that smoke."

The Ogrum had attacked the Idaho with their sleeping gas! The guards in the temple had carried sacks of what Craig had thought were ordinary grenades. They had been gas grenades!

Plunk went the projector outside the temple. *Plunk* went the grenade that struck on the roof.

Plunk, plunk, plunk— A shower of grenades came over. Gas swirled over the roof of the temple.

"Knock out those projectors!" Craig shouted. He leaped to the wall of the temple, began firing. All around him other guns were letting go. Up to now it had been necessary to conserve ammunition as much as possible. If the projectors were not knocked out, no amount of ammunition would do the humans any good.

The rattle of sub-machine guns was a continuous tumult of sound. Fires still burned in the city and the air was becoming heavy with smoke. All around the temple the Ogrum were lurking. They were not venturing into the open. Now and then they could be glimpsed darting from shelter to shelter.

Plunk—plunk—plunk—

More gas grenades hit on the roof.

Somewhere near him Craig heard a man choke and gasp for breath. Everywhere, even above the rattle of the machine guns, he could hear men coughing. Somthing stung his lungs and he coughed himself. The machine gun fire began to thin out as choking men dropped their guns. Craig found himself firing blindly, searching for the hidden projectors. The plunk of the gas grenades was loud in his ears.

"Tough luck," a thin voice said near him.

He looked around and saw Margy Sharp. The girl was holding a handkerchief over her nose and was trying to keep from breathing. She was swaying.

"I feel like I want to go to sleep," she whispered.

The gas was getting to her. It was getting to others, too. Many of the sailors had fallen. Some of them were trying to drag themselves back to the edge of the roof, trying to lift guns with hands that no longer had the strength for the task.

"We fought a good fight," Margy Sharp whispered. "Too bad we lost."

"We haven't lost yet," Craig gritted.

He was lying and he knew it. His only hope was phase four of the attack plan. Unless phase four went into operation within the space of minutes, they were doomed. "What the hell has happened to Michaelson?" he thought.

Plunk, plunk, plunk, went the grenades.

Had the scientist failed? Had something happened to Michaelson?

THE night was hideous with the yells of the Ogrum. Sensing victory, they were screaming with delight. Meanwhile, all over the roof of the temple, more of the gas grenades were exploding. The wind, which had quickened to a stiff breeze, swept much of the gas away. But not all of it. One whiff

of it and a man lost half his efficiency. Three whiffs and he was asleep.

A man in an officer's uniform crawled to Craig's feet, looked up at him. It was Captain Higgins.

"I—I guess this is it," the captain said.

"I guess so," Craig said miserably. The gas stung his lungs again and he coughed. Slowly, a little at a time, he could feel a deadly lassitude stealing over him. A weight was tugging at his knees, trying to force his legs to buckle. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to lie down and go to sleep. He fought against the impulse. From this threatened sleep a man would awaken all right—in the prison pen of the Ogrum, there to wait his turn to become a sacrifice to the sun.

Two or three machine guns—no more—were still firing, holding off the Ogrum horde. When those guns stopped—

The flames of the burning city danced in the night. The air was heavy with smoke. The screams of the dinosaurs were louder, as if the great beasts were excited by the conflagration in the city of the Ogrum. Craig was vaguely aware that only two guns were firing. In spite of all his efforts to resist the impulse, he sank to his knees. The grenades continued to plunk on the roof. Only one gun was firing. Beside him, Craig saw that Margy Sharp had gone quietly to sleep. She looked like a little girl who is all tired out with play and has decided to lie down and take a nap.

Boom-boom! Boom-boom-boom!

Five thudding explosions came through the night. They did not come from the temple, or near it. They were at least half a mile away.

The sound lifted Craig to his feet.

"Michaelson!" he screamed. He tried to look in the direction from which the sound of the explosions had come. The smoke was too heavy. He could not see.

"Michaelson—" his voice was a whisper. "For God's sake, hurry!"

There was no answer. Craig waited. No more explosions came. He sank to his knees, fighting against the impulse to sleep. He was dimly aware that the screams of the Ogrum had died into abrupt silence. No more grenades were plunking on the roof. He wondered if the Ogrum were preparing to charge the temple, to strike down all who had strength left to oppose them. He lifted himself up, looked over the edge.

The Ogrum were no longer watching the temple. They were staring in the direction of the explosions. They had come out into the open. He could see little groups of them nervously looking in the other direction.

DIMLY, in the distance, he heard the beginning thunder of sound. It was something like the vague roar of a starting avalanche, a rumble, a mutter, a dim murmer growing louder. The smoke was too thick for him to see what was happening.

The murmer grew in volume. It became as loud as the roar of a tornado. The Ogrum stared toward it, trying to understand what it was. They were getting nervous, now. A few of them had started to run.

Something came through the smoke. It came in a lumbering gallop, a huge and terribly frightened beast. It saw the fires in front of it. Screaming it tried to turn back. The pressure of the horde behind carried it along.

A confused mass of dark bodies poured into the city. There were hundreds of them, thousands of them. Scared to the point of madness their one thought was how to escape. The smallest of them weighed more than two tons.

Craig, fighting against the effect of the gas, sobbed in sudden relief.

"Michaleson," he whispered. "You got there in time. You did it! You did it—"

Phase four of the attack plan had come into operation. Phase four called for Guru and the scientist to go around the edges of the vast swamp and set it on fire. Part of the swamp foliage would not burn under any circumstances. But great areas of dry reeds would burn like tinder.

The dinosaurs would run from the fires. The blazes would be set so the great monsters would have to flee toward the city. At the proper moment, the wall the Ogrum had built to keep them from the city would be blown up.

The dinosaurs would stampede across the city.

Craig remembered reading of the stampede of the long-horn cattle in the early days of the American west. Thousands of cattle, running madly, shook the earth with the thunder of their hooves, destroyed everything that stood in their way.

Not cattle, but dinosaurs, were stampeding across the city of the Ogrum.

Too late, the Ogrum saw them coming. They tried to run. The great beasts trampled them into muck. Huts, struck by the maddened animals, flew to pieces. Many of them, blinded, not knowing where they were going, ran into the temple. The great building shuddered at each impact. Voronoff, caught somewhere in that wild stampede, must have known too late that he had deserted too soon, before he knew the complete plan of attack. Either he did not know of phase four or the Ogrum had not believed him when he told them about it.

For hours, it seemed to Craig, the screams of the Ogrum echoed through the city. The screams were drowned in the earth-shaking thunder of the stampede. The herd of dinosaurs crossed the city, turned and swept along the edge of the bay. By the time the last of them had passed through, the only building left standing in the whole area was the temple. Everything else had been smashed flat. Smouldering fires were rising again in the wreckage of the huts. What the dinosaurs had started, fires would finish.

When the last of the beasts had gone, Michaelson, his squad of sailors, and Guru came hurrying through the darkness. Guru was accompanied by dozens of his people, hastily recruited for the task of firing the swamp. Craig yelled at them.

"Come up here and stand guard!" he shouted. "I'm going to take a nap."

CHAPTER VIII

The End of Adventure

CRAIG stood at the rail of the ship. The sun was setting and the long shadows of dusk reached across the world. Michaelson stood beside Craig. As usual, the scientist was excited.

"The Ogrum presented a strange case of warped development," he said. "Do you know what they were?"

"Devils," Craig grunted. He was not much interested in what the scientist was saying.

"Chemists!" Michaelson said triumphantly. "Through some freak, nature developed a type of life that had the mentality to become excellent chemists but with little or no ability in any other line. The acid they used on the Idaho, the gas they had developed, everything points to the conclusion that they were chemists. From what was left of their hangar, their planes were made of plastics—not a piece of metal in them. Even the ruined motors looked as though they were made of plastics.

The Ogrum knew nothing of the wheel, the arch, or of architecture, yet they were almost perfect chemists."

The scientist sounded very pleased with himself for having made this discovery. "If you had not destroyed their temple, we might have found out more about them," he said accusingly.

On the dawn of the next day the systematic destruction of the entire city had been carried out. Hundreds of grenades had been planted in the temple and it had been demolished.

"Surivival," Craig said. "We've got to live in this world and it's not big enough to hold us and the Ogrum. Certainly I destroyed their city. Some of them probably managed to escape alive. I'm not going to leave any rat's nest where they can get together again."

"Well, you were right about it," the scientist said. "The only thing is, I would have liked to know more about them."

"I know enough about them to last me a life-time," Craig said bitterly. "Oh, hello," The last was spoken to the girl who had emerged from below and had come to the rail.

"Good evening," she answered. She said nothing more but stood at the rail and stared into the gathering dusk. Craig was silent too.

"I should have liked to know how they worked those silent plane motors," Michaelson said.

"Huh? What did you say?" Craig asked.

"You weren't listening," the scientist accused. He adjusted his glasses and looked along the rail to where Margy Sharp was standing. "Ah, I see," he said.

"You see what?" Craig challenged, grinning.

"I see that my presence not only is no longer necessary but is not wanted." The scientist smiled and walked away.

DUSK came down. Craig was never quite sure how it happened but somehow he and the girl found themselves closer together. "Margy," he said, "about the water, in the lifeboat—"

"Oh, that," the girl said. "If you're worried about that, I've been talking to Mrs. Miller. She was awake most of the night the water disappeared. She says she isn't certain but she thought she saw somebody crawl forward and help himself while you were asleep."

Craig sighed. All the time he had known he hadn't taken the water. The important thing was for Margy to know it.

"Look," said Craig, gesturing toward the shore line, "out there is a new world, new lands, new places, all waiting to be explored. It's all ours, every foot of it, to be explored—"

"Ours?" the girl questioned, and her voice was very low.

"Yes," Craig said. "What I mean is—Margy— Well, you once said we were two of a kind—and—

"I think," the girl said calmly, "that Captain Higgins has the authority to make us *one* of a kind, if that is what you are trying to say."

"That," Craig shouted, "is exactly what I am trying to say."

THE dusk deepened into darkness. They were very close together now. Saying nothing, they looked toward shore, toward that vast, strange new land where no human foot had ever trod. It was in Craig's mind that this strange adventure in time was almost over. Then, as he thought of the new worlds that his sons and grandsons would have the privilege of exploring, the thought came that adventure is never over—it is always just beginning.

THE END

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Lagrange

He was one of the greatest mathematicians of the eighteenth century. Algebra, mechanics, astronomy benefited by his genius.

JOSEPH LOUIS LAGRANGE, one of the greatest mathematicians of the eighteenth century was born in Turin, Italy, January 25, 1736. He was of French extraction, his great-grandfather, a cavalry captain, having passed from the service of France to that of Sardinia, and settled in Turin under Emmanuel II. He was son of the war treasurer of the King of Sardinia, and was educated at Turin college. His interest in mathematics was aroused by the chance reading of a memoir by Halley. He then began unaided a course of study pursued with such effect that at the age of 18 he was appointed professor of geometry at the artillery academy. The following year he sent Euler, the Swiss mathematician, a correct solution of what was known at that time as the isoperimetric problem, which he accomplished by supplying a notation for an extension of the principles of the calculus of variations. This notable step in the growth of the science gave him such a reputation among European mathematicians that he was offered the chair of mathematics in the military school at Turin.

In 1758 he founded the Royal Academy of Turin. In 1764 he received the prize offered by the Academy of Sciences at Paris for an investigation on the liberation of the moon. This success encouraged the academy to propose, in 1766, as a problem the theory of the Jovian system. The prize was again awarded to Lagrange; and he won the same distinction in 1772, 1774, and 1778. He visited Paris and there met Clairaut, D'Alembert the Abbé Marie, and others. In 1776, on the recommendation of Euler and D'Alembert, Lagrange went to Berlin to fill the post at the academy vacated by Euler; at the invitation by Frederick the Great who expressed the wish of "The greatest king in Europe" to have "the greatest mathematician in Europe" at his court. Lagrange held this position for twenty years, during which time he communicated many memoirs to the Berlin academy dealing with algebra, mechanics, and astronomy, and produced his great work, *Mécanique analytique,* which testifies to his genius and analysis.

After the death of Frederick the Great, Lagrange accepted Louis XVI.'s invitation to Paris. Here he was given apartments in the Louvre, was continually honoured, and was treated with respect throughout the Revolution. He was elected a member of the French Academy. During the Revolution he was at the head of the commission which had in charge the establishment of the metric or decimal system, and was also a member of the bureau for rewarding useful inventions.

In 1792 he married the daughter of the astronomer Lemonnier, and, although she was much younger than he, the union proved a very happy one. In 1795 when the École Polytechnique was established, he became one of its professors. After the Revolution he was made professor in the École Normale, Paris.

When Napoleon came into power he was made a member of the Senate and was given the rank of count.

The accomplishment which entitles Lagrange to be regarded as one of the notable discoverers in the realm of the sciences was his development of the principles of "virtual velocities," a phrase or expression coined by Jean Bernouilli in 1717, most unfortunately, for it has nothing to do with velocities as the word is ordinarily used. The principle, as now understood is the following:

"If a body is in equilibrium, the sum of all the forces, each multiplied by the practical velocity of its point of application is, for every possible infinitesimal displacement of the body, equal to zero."

The principle expressed in this way is not easy to comprehend. Perhaps the simplest illustration of the idea back of the phenomenon is to be obtained from the action of the movable pulley where, if the force applied to the cord (like a weight) moves down a certain distance, another weight fastened to the pulley must move up such a distance, that the product of each weight by its distance is the same.

In pure mathematics Lagrange is noted for his contributions to the theory of series, the theory of numbers, differential equations, the numerical solution of equations, and the calculus of variations. His astronomical work was just as remarkable.

In 1810 he began the revision of his *Mécanique analytique,* but died on April 10, 1813, before it was completed. He was buried in the Pantheon, the funeral oration being given by Laplace and Lacepede. Lagrange was a very modest man, and had a great dislike of controversy.

DIRECT

by CLEE GARSON

Mort and Mike got strange calls on this phone; they didn't come through Central!

THERE is an empty cigar store on the first floor of the loop building in which I keep my office. Formerly it was managed by two of the slickest small time gambling operators who ever booked a bang-tail or banked a game of Hooligan.

There is a small, neatly lettered sign on the door of that unoccupied store now, however, which has caused no end of comment from the former customers of the "cigar store" who had always been all too cheerfully happy to lose their daily dollars there.

The sign reads:

"CLOSED FOR THE DURATION
Due to our having
Entered The Armed

WIRE

He had a strange husky voice that made queer chills go up and down your spine

Forces of the U. S.
GOD BLESS AMERICA
Mort & Mike"

If you haven't guessed as much by now, the signatures at the bottom of that sign are those of the two former proprietors of the establishment, Mort Robbins and Mike Harrigan.

Now since both Mort and Mike were of military age, and since this nation is at war, it should hardly seem unusual that their former customers and all who knew them would consider their summons to the colors something worthy of great comment. It should hardly seem unusual, that is, unless you happened to know the two, and realized further that they were not drafted, but

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voluntarily enlisted.

Neither was what you could call deeply patriotic, you see. Nor were they the sort to be influenced by such emotional appeals as the beating of drums, the waving of flags, or the playing of brass bands marching along Jackson Boulevard.

"We gotta lick them lice!" Mike constantly proclaimed in regard to Adolf and the Axis, when war discussions came up around the "cigar store." But aside from those loud and perhaps sincere pronouncements, Mike's only contribution to the cause of Victory was the purchase of war bonds which he looked on merely with the cold eye of one seeking a smart investment. And as for his attitude toward the army, Mike best expressed himself with a small embryo ulcer which he kept always on the verge of eruption within twenty-four hours notice to report for a draft board examination. It was rumored that, through a swift, sufficient amount of whisky, Mike could make his embryo ulcer dance angrily for the draft medicos at any time. This none too admirable accomplishment with an ailment not actually serious had kept Mike Harrigan in Class 4 F ever since the last draft registration.

As for Mike's partner, Mort Robbins, the patriotic picture was pretty much the same. Mort was loudly belligerent toward our enemies in all the "cigar store" discussions, wisely put much of his funds into war bonds, but kept one of the most extensive libraries of medical statements from doctors in existance. All these statements concerned the tragic asthma and hay-fever of one Mort Robbins and went on to declare that he might possibly stop breathing completely should he be placed in the army. The fact that Mort had connived to get these statements and was not really seriously troubled by those two maladies didn't alter the fact that they had resulted so far in keeping him out of khaki.

Consequently, since more than one of their customers knew or suspected their lack of practical patriotism, the appearance of that sign on the door of what had once been their establishment caused quite a considerable flurry of comment for a time.

Naturally, no one could understand what had caused it all. For that, they can't be blamed. I'd never have understood it, if I hadn't accidentally been the one person in the world, outside of Mort and Mike, who knew the true story . . .

ON THE morning that it all began, I was down in the "cigar store," killing time and having a coke and some conversation before going upstairs to the grimly reproachful surroundings of my too neglected office.

Mike Harrigan was the only one behind the counter, and I was the only one on the customer side.

Mike was red headed and freckle necked, a massive chap with a blarney smile and a baby face. He's been in the "cigar store" bookie racket ever since repeal had closed a speakeasy he'd had on Grand Avenue. This morning, however, he was glaring glumly down at a newspaper spread before him atop the glass cigar counter, and scarcely nodded to half my conversational sallies.

"What's eating you, Mike?" I finally demanded. "That ulcer getting well in spite of you?"

Mike ignored the crack. But he looked up from his reading and jabbed a big red freckled thumb down on a column of print in the paper before him.

"That State's Attorney!" Mike snorted indignantly. "He's gonna go too far pretty damn soon!"

"What now?" I grinned. Mike was always indignant over the efforts of the State's Attorney to "ruin an honest man's business" with his crack-downs on small-time handbooks throughout the city. "What's his latest move in the battle against Mike Harrigan?"

"This here story in the paper," Mike declared, "says how the State's Attorney's office is starting to investigate the lists of the telephone company in order to track down any phones used by us bookmakers in our business. It's illegal!" He concluded with the virtuous snort of an indignant taxpayer shocked by the violation of law, smacking his big red-knuckled hand on the counter top to emphasize his disturbance.

"Aha!" I said. "In other words the State's Attorney's office is going to find their way into this handbook of yours by the direct approach, eh? It'll take time for them, won't it, to go over the entire telephone lists?"

"You never can tell," Mike predicted gloomily. "They might nail us all," he snapped his big fingers, "like that."

I glanced over at the telephone booth in the corner of the store. Its folding door was open, and the ever-present "Out Of Order" sign was suspended from a cord around the mouthpiece. Over that phone Mike and Mort conducted the bulk of their horse booking business. Through it they kept in touch with a central gambling syndicate service which provided day-long racing results, odds and other essential data to numerous other such small establishments around the city. Through it, also, they took in a nice business of telephone bets from wagerers too busy to get in to make them in person. The never-missing "Out of Order" sign was to prevent customers from using the telephone for out-going calls which might interfere with business. The telephone was, of course, not at all out of order.

"Maybe," I suggested cheerfully, taking my eyes from the telephone booth, "they'll snatch out your phone on you. Then where'll you be?"

Mike smacked his open palm against his broad brow.

"My God," he exclaimed, "don't say no such things!"

I gulped the rest of my coke, lit another cigarette, shrugged cheerfully, and started for the door. I turned before leaving.

"Cheer up," I said. "This will probably blow over. And if it doesn't, there's always the army."

MIKE glared and started to answer. And at that moment the telephone in the booth began to ring. He started for it, and I started out the door again, running headlong into Mort Robbins.

"Good morning, good morning, chumly!" Mort exclaimed cheerfully when we had untangled ourselves. "What's new with you?"

Mort is short, slightly on the plump side, with straight, dark hair, a round, beaming face, and a penchant for flamboyantly colored sport shirts.

"Nothing's new with me," I told him, "but plenty seems to be new with Mike. He's cursing the State's Attorney's office again."

Mort frowned.

"Whatcha mean? What's on the fire now? I didn't read the morning rags yet."

Briefly, I told him about the news story which had excited his partner. He nodded, thought a moment, then grinned.

"They can't do that," he said. "It's illegal."

"Tell Mike, if that's so," I said. "He's working himself into a boil."

Mort hadn't heard me. He was

frowning thoughtfully again.

"Or can they?" he wondered aloud. "Where's that news story?"

I pointed to the paper on the counter and he stepped over to it. I started to leave again, but at that moment the telephone booth in the corner shook from side to side and Mike stepped out, face red with wrath.

"I'd like to get my hands on that guy, the wisenheimer!" he growled. "Hah! Practical jokes, eh?"

Again I stopped at the door.

"What's wrong this time?" I demanded. "Or is it still the State's Attorney you're frothing about?"

"Some guy," Mike thundered explosively, "just called to say he wanted to talk to Hitler and Mussolini. Wise guy, hah, the louse!"

"Hitler and Mussolini?" I demanded. "Who was it?"

"Wouldn't I like to know," Mike exclaimed redly. "Wouldn't I just like to know!" He made a grasping gesture with his two big fists, indicating what he would do to the party if he did know.

Mort had put down the newspaper and had been listening to Mike's explosion.

"Don't bust your buttons, Mike," Mort advised. "It's probably just one of our customers having a gag."

"Bum gag, I say. If they wanta gag whyn't they gag funny?" Mike snorted angrily. "Talk to Hitler and Mussolini, eh? Huh!"

And at that juncture, the telephone rang again. Mort looked up, then looked at me and winked. He turned to Mike, who'd started wrathfully for the booth.

"Hold it, chumly," Mort said. "I'll answer this one. If it's the joker again I can handle him better than you can."

MORT walked nonchalantly over to the booth, took down the receiver, and turned to wink again at me.

"Hello," Mort said.

Obviously the voice on the other end of the wire said something. Mort grinned.

"They ain't here," Mort said, grinning more widely. "No. Not either of 'em. Adolf sleeps late and don't get down until noon. Benito is out having himself a milkshake. Who'll I tell 'em called? Huh? What's that? You call back? But who'll I tell 'em called? Huh? Gab— Gabby? What?"

Mort put the receiver back on the hook and turned back to us, stepping out of the booth.

"The joker said to tell Adolf and Benito he'd call back later. I didn't get his name, but it sounded like Gabby. Smart joe, this Gabby."

Mike was glaring. "Gabby, eh? Gabby, Gabby, Gabby," he scratched his red head frowningly. "Who do I know named Gabby?"

"Skip it," Mort advised smilingly. "It wouldn't be the right monicker, anyway."

Mike muttered dourly, moving back behind the counter. Suddenly he stopped.

"You see the morning paper?" he asked his partner in sudden recollection. "You see about that louse State's Att—"

"Yeah, I read it," Mort cut him off. "It'll blow over, even if they get away with it. But they might not even get away with it. It's illegal."

Mike beamed for the first time since I'd seen him that morning. Obviously he was pleased to his own legal judgment upheld by his partner.

"You think so? That's what I thought." He turned to me. "Isn't that what I thought?" he demanded.

"Did you call for the morning line check on the tracks yet?" Mort asked, changing the subject.

Mike shook his head. "I was wait-

ing for a few phone bets to come in, first," he said.

"How many come in so far?" Mort asked.

Mike suddenly looked at his wrist match and swore. "None!" he exclaimed. "None and it's already after ten!"

Mort looked alarmed. "You mean the phone ain't rang with a bet since you been down?"

"Only time the phone rung was with that practical joker, twicet. You heard 'em," Mike declared.

"But by this time we generally have a couple dozen bets in from the phones!" Mort exclaimed. "This is bad. Whatcha think goes?"

"Goes?" Mike exclaimed indignantly. "How should I know what goes?"

Mort suddenly clapped his palm to his brow. "Maybe it's got somethin' to do with that news story!"

"About the State's Attorney gonna check the phone lists?" Mike demanded.

"Yeah."

Mike thought this over. "No," he decided. "Couldn't be. Not so soon, yet. Tomorrow, maybe, but not so soon."

Mort calmed down a little. "You're right there," he said. "It wouldn't be so soon."

"Maybe this is a bad day," I broke in. "Maybe your customers just aren't betting this morning."

Mort and Mike looked at me as if I were crazy, which possibly I was. Two dozen steady horse players don't all stop at once, if ever.

Mike was as sorely troubled as Mort.

"We got at least couple dozen bets acrosst the counter already this morning," he said. "But no phone bets."

"Maybe the damn thing is *actually* out of order," Mort groaned, glancing at the telephone.

"Then how did we get them two calls from the joker?" Mike demanded. "No. That phone ain't no more outta order than I am."

"You're right. I forgot those calls," Mort acknowledged.

AND at that moment the telephone rang again. Mort looked at Mike. Mike looked at Mort. Both wet their lips.

"Ordinary days that joker might be funny," Mort said. "But now I'm thinking this isn't an ordinary day. I'm thinking it's not as funny as I first thought."

He crossed to the telephone booth, jerked the receiver from the hook, and bellowed into the mouthpiece.

"Hello!"

There was a brief pause in which someone said something to him from the other end of the wire.

"Listen!" Mort suddenly exploded. "Nothing is funny three times, wise guy. I wish you would take your Hitler-Mussolini gag and—" at which point he described what he wanted the caller to do with the gag. Then, slamming the receiver back into the hook, Mort stormed out of the booth.

"Same guy?" Mike demanded, his veins bulging in his thick, freckled neck.

"Same guy," Mort said grimly. His lips were tight. "He asked if we could get Hitler and Musso to the phone in a hurry. He said the connection was getting weaker and weaker, and he was afraid it wouldn't hold out much longer."

"The connection?" I broke in, puzzled.

Mort looked on the verge of apoplexy. "The connection from where he was calling to earth, the wise guy said!" he exploded. "If we could only trace that call I'd break that no-good's neck!"

Mike and Mort evidently took turns acting as sobering influence on each other.

"Now we don't wanta get too riled," Mike pointed out with surprising sense. "The gag artist prob'ly wants we should get mad like this. We'll forget 'em. I'll call for the morning line and the odd changes for the first races."

Mort drummed his fingers on the cigar showcase, cooling himself off. Mike marched over to the telephone booth and wedged himself inside. With one big red finger, he dialed a number rapidly after he took the telephone from the hook. But he only half completed his dialing. It broke off as he uttered a choking curse.

"Listen you!" Mike suddenly bellowed, the echoes in the booth almost knocking it over. "Get the hell offa this line! Howdja get on in the first place?"

Mort stopped drumming his fingers and glanced startledly at the booth. Crimson began to return to his face.

"What's up?" he shouted. He started toward the booth. I followed him. We could hear Mike spluttering incoherently inside. Then there was an ear-splitting racket as the big bookie smashed the receiver back into the hook and turned purple faced toward us.

"The gag artist!" he raged. "The same damn wise guy. The Hitler-Mussolini smart aleck. He was waitin' on the line. He hadn't hung up. He told me he hadda wait on the line, cause he didn't dare break off the connection. He said it was too hard to make inna first place. He said he hoped we didn't mind if he waited until we got Adolf and Benito on the wire fer him!"

BY now Mort was spluttering, and this time neither partner seemed to have a calming effect on the other. They were both raging, boiling mad.

"I'll call the cops!" Mike bellowed. "That's what I'll do!" He began to pace up and down. "I'll have that guy electrocuted!"

"I'm going out," Mort stormed, "and get the operator onna 'nother phone. I'll report that so-and-so, and they'll trace him down through the telephone company!"

He started for the door. Mike grabbed his arm.

"Waita minute!" he exclaimed. "We can't do that!"

Mort tore his arm from his partner's grasp. "What's stopping us?" he demanded.

"The State's Attorney's office!" Mike groaned. "Maybe it's a trap set by them skunks from the State's Attorney's office. Maybe it's the start of their telephone tracing of bookmakers!"

Sickly, Mort turned back. His face was still flushed, but three fourths of his steam was gone.

"Maybe you're right," he admitted. "And if so, what a helluva note this is!"

I couldn't hold back my curiosity any longer.

"Look," I said. "I have an idea. If it's a joker, perhaps I can talk him out of it better than you boys. You'll need that wire today, and the joker might just be drunk and obstinate enough to hang on all day long to spite you. Maybe he knows you won't dare report it. I'm not steamed up; maybe I'll reason with him better because I'm not. You want me to?"

Mort and Mike gave me grateful glances.

"You get ridda that wise guy," Mike said, "and we'll never ferget it!"

"Go to it, chumly," Mort said, "and if you lose that louse, we'll make it up to you!"

I went over to the booth and, stepping inside, took the receiver from the hook. I had a jovial, let's-be-friends opener all ready.

"Hello, pal," I said amiably.

The voice that came to my ears was distinctly unlike what I'd expected. I don't quite know *how* or *why* it sounded so strange and eerie, but it did. It was a man's voice, coming over the wire the way long distance calls used to sound before they got transmission technique down pat.

"Hello there," said the voice. "Have they arrived yet?"

It wasn't the voice of a drunk. And if it were that of a practical joker, the poker-faced quality of it was perfect acting. It sounded earnestly, eagerly serious.

"You mean Adolf and Benito?" I asked. I was willing to play ball for a few minutes if it brought results. Besides, I was curious.

"Yes."

"Why do you want to talk to them?" I asked.

"*I* don't want to talk to them. My boss does," the voice answered.

"Then put your boss on," I said. "I'll talk to him."

"You are neither Hitler nor Mussolini," the voice replied. "He wishes to speak only to them. He's very busy. Too busy to waste time in idle conversation. Please fetch Hitler and Mussolini to the wire."

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"I have already covered that ground with the other parties I spoke to before you," the voice said. "Please hurry and bring Adolf and Benito to the phone. This connection is getting progressively worse. It can't last much longer. We spent several years getting it through, you know."

"Did you now?" I asked politely.

"Yes we did," the voice answered stiffly. Then, annoyed: "*Must* you waste this precious time? Please bring Hitler and Mussolini to the telephone as quickly as possible."

THERE was a fuzzy crackling over the wire. Like a ship-to-shore connection.

"Listen, pal," I said. "This joke is costing a couple of guys some lucrative trade. You are tying up a telephone they need badly in their business, or didn't you know that?"

"That can't be helped," the voice said stiffly.

"Be a good sport and get off the wire," I said.

"I have no intention of doing that until my boss has talked to Hitler and Mussolini," the voice said coldly. I knew a positive statement when I heard one. I hung up, clambered out of the booth, spread my hands expressively to Mike and Mort who stood there eagerly waiting for some good word.

"No soap," I said. "I don't think you got a joker on there, and I'd swear you haven't got a drunk."

"What have we got, then," Mike demanded. "A smart copper waiting to trap us?"

I shook my head. "I think you got a loony," I said. "But don't quote me." I started toward the door. "I got work to do, gents, but I'll look in again a little later. Hope you get rid of your pest."

"We'd better," Mike moaned dismally.

"Brother," Mort declared, pulling his hair and making a sincerely distraught face, "you're not kidding!"

I looked at the telephone booth and shook my head. "Somebody is," I told them. . . .

FOR perhaps three hours I was able to concentrate on my work, with the telephone booth distraction cropping up only about every fifteen minutes or so to give me the fidgets.

At the end of that time, a little before two o'clock, I finally covered up

my reproachful typewriter and, on the excuse that I wanted a coke, left the office to go down and see how the boys were doing with the determined loony on their telephone.

The "cigar store" was crowded with the usual early-afternoon hang-arounders when I walked in. Mort and Mike, each behind a dice board, were accommodating trusting suckers who had somehow gotten the mistaken idea that Hooligan was a game you beat every other time.

Mike, looking up, noticed my entrance first. He signaled to me, muttered an excuse to the dice roller at his board, and came quickly around the counter. He took me by the arm and steered me out into the building lobby.

"Listen, pal," he half-whispered, "fer gawdsakes don't say anything about the jerk on the telephone. Mort and me ain't told anyone, fer fear of the ribbing we'd get, plus the kick in the pants it would give our regular betting business over the counter."

"You mean the guy's still on the telephone?" I demanded.

Mike nodded a little sickly. "We can't get him off. And since we ain't letting on to no one about the phone being fritzed that way, every time he rings, we pretend we're getting an odd change, or some scratches or result. Mort an' me have been running our legs off, using a telephone next door to get our prices and results and such dope from the syndicate. But don't let on. We ain't told no one!"

"Okay," I promised. "I'll keep mum. But who in the hell do you suppose it is?"

Mike lowered his voice even more, looking furtively around the building lobby.

"Confidentially, although we don't dare draw attention to our joint since the State's Attorney is telephone prowling, Mort and me decided you was right. It must be a loony. All we can do is wait until he gets tired and gets off."

I nodded. "That's about all you can do," I agreed. "Does he still want to talk to Hitler and Mussolini?"

Mike nodded disgustedly. "Worse than ever. Calling every twenty minutes now. Mort and me is going crazy answering them calls and pretending they ain't nothing but syndicate results."

"I don't blame you," I said. "I would, too." Mike went back into the store and behind the dice board. I took a coke out of the cooler and uncapped it on the side of the machine.

Mort sent me a message in his glance, and I nodded reassuringly to him.

"I don't know anything," I said.

Mort grinned a sick, grateful sort of grin, and went back to the task of taking quarters from his customers. Taking my time with my cigarette, I finished my coke. Then the telephone rang, as I'd been waiting for it to do.

Mort dashed to the booth, closed the door as he entered, and for several flushed minutes appeared to be talking into the phone and writing something on a scratch pad. But I knew it was an act from the pained expression on his face. I knew that the loony was babbling away again and that Mort was having to listen for the sake of the pose.

When at last he hung up, he emerged mopping his face with a gaily colored handkerchief. The look he shot me was confirmation enough that the loony was still on the wire.

UNABLE to feel too sorry for the boys, I concealed a grin behind a yawn, nodded to them both, and left the place. Upstairs once more in my office I got back into a rather muggy stream

of work on which I found difficulty concentrating.

For some reason I couldn't at first explain to myself, I kept thinking about the telephone loony of Mike and Mort's. Not because of the ironically ridiculous turmoil it threw them into, but for some other reason far more subtle, but which I was unable to put my finger on.

The thing amused me, puzzled me, and yet, somehow was beginning to trouble me. Not through any great sympathy for Mike or Mort, of course. It will be a cold day when my heart bleeds for bookmakers. But something or other *was* growing more and more bothersome. I thought about it a while, then shoved it out of my mind and got back to work.

I was able to grind along for a couple of hours without having it come back into my mind. And when it popped up again, I shoved it away once more just as quickly. I had to get that work out, and I knew I wouldn't if I stewed any longer over the telephone loony who was quite probably still playing hob with Mike and Mort at that moment.

It was a little after five o'clock, five-fifteen, to be exact, when—work or no work—the thing hit me. Bang! Like that I knew what'd been in the back of my mind.

How in the name of blazes had the telephone loony been able to stay on that wire so indefinitely? Why hadn't the operator broken in to end the connection each time Mort or Mike hung up? It seemed logical that she would have done so. The loony couldn't have just held onto the telephone and been right on tap the moment Mort or Mike picked up the hook. The loony could have called them, of course, but it would have been impossible for him to be on hand every time they picked up the telephone when it hadn't been ringing!

I left my typewriter, not even bothering to remove the page in it, and hurried out of the office. Downstairs I found the "cigar store" completely deserted except for Mike and Mort. The day's races were over, and dice customers who were willing enough to roll cubes in office time, had headed homeward.

"Brother," Mort greeted me," "you were right and how!"

"About the loony—" I began.

"That's right," Mort said. "He was as loony a loony as I've ever heard of. We finally got rid of him."

"Got rid of him?" I blurted the question.

"Yeah," Mort nodded. "And I hope for good. He just faded off, about half an hour after his voice began to get dimmer and dimmer, and that was that."

"But—" I began.

"And wait'll you hear who that bug thought he was."

"Gabby who?" I asked.

"Gabby, nuts. I messed it up the first time. He thought he was Gabriel, the *Angel* Gabriel, no less!" Mort exclaimed, tapping the side of his head.

"The Angel Gabriel?" I echoed.

Mort nodded. "And guess who he was calling for?"

"Don't tell me," I said.

"That's right," Mort declared. "He said he was God's secretary, Gabriel, calling from Heaven for his boss. He said his boss wanted to talk to Hitler and Mussolini!"

I BLINKED. "And what was God going to tell those lice?"

"To take it on the lam, or else!" Mike broke in.

"No fooling?"

"So help me!" Mort swore. "What a loony. He went on to say—this fake Angel Gabriel—that his boss just wanted to tell those two jerks, Adolf and

Benito, that enough was enough and they were dead ducks for sure."

"What made this Gabriel from the nut house get so confidential all of a sudden?" I demanded. "He wouldn't tell his business at all at first."

"This'll kill you," Mort said. "The connection, like I say, kept getting fainter and fainter, and our goofy Gabriel said it was fading off and that we'd have to hand the message on to Hitler and Mussolini for his boss, if we couldn't bring the two jerks to the phone to hear it in person."

"Did he bother to explain," I asked, "why he didn't call Adolf and Benito directly, if his boss wanted to tell them off?"

"So help me," Mort declared, "he did. He said that with the war all over our globe like it is, there was a lot of space interference everywhere preventin' communication. He said he couldn't be choosy, and had to use any wire he could get through to. It happened to be ours. Can you beat it?"

I shook my head slowly. "No," I said, "I can't. But what trick could he have used to stay on the phone indefinitely, connected right to your wire, even after you hung up on him each time?" And then, briefly, I explained the rest of my puzzle over that little item.

"If you can figure that out," I concluded, "we'll have to admit that, loony or not, he was nothing less than a mad genius."

Mort shrugged. "I'm no telephone man," he said, "but there must be some explana—" His sentence stopped abruptly, and he and Mike seemed to be looking over my shoulder.

I turned, to see an overall clad chap carrying a canvas toolbag just stepping through the door. He smiled cheerfully at the three of us.

"I'm the man from the telephone company," he said amiably. "I got here a little earlier today, missed you last night. Had to have the night elevator operator let me into your store. Hope you weren't too inconvenienced today."

"What's it all about?" Mort demanded. "What do you mean? You know about the loony?"

The telephone man had stopped by the booth. He was opening his tool bag. He looked up.

"Loony? No, I'm sorry, I don't know anything about any loony."

"Who called himself the Angel Gabriel?" Mike broke in.

The telephone man smiled up at us in genial bewilderment.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said, "I don't quite get the drift of all this. All I know is that I was in here last night to disconnect your telephone temporarily, and I'm back again tonight to return it to service. I saw your "Out of Order" sign there, so I thought you'd expected me and knew all about it."

MORT stepped forward. His face a curious picture of bewilderment and disbelief, he asked:

"Wait a minute! You mean to say this telephone hasn't been connected all day today?"

The telephone man nodded. "That's right. But I'm putting it back in order now."

"We got calls over that phone today!" Mike asserted vigorously. "It couldn't have been disconnected."

The telephone man chuckled. "Good joke. You couldn't have received a call over this telephone. It would have been utterly impossible. It was completely disconnected." He went on tool sorting.

Mike was looking at Mort. Mort was looking at the telephone man. I was looking at all three, and the tele-

phone man was unconcernedly taking out wires from his bag.

"You—you aren't kidding?" Mort's voice came choked. "This was really disconnected?"

The telephone man shoved the booth a little to one side, grabbed some wires then visible beneath the booth, and pulled them forth. They were all neatly severed, with the ends taped.

Mike and Mort were staring at the severed ends of the wires, then at one another.

"Mike," said Mort, "I think it is a good idea we should get drunk."

"My old lady," said Mike, "used to believe in this sort of stuff. Maybe she wasn't such a dope."

Mort nodded. "My old man, too."

Neither said a word to me. Neither spoke to the telephone man They just walked out, arm in arm, never looking back once, even at the cash register.

I understand they got drunk that night. But I understand Mike kept his ulcer carefully under the explosive line, so that he passed the enlistment exams the following morning. Mort left his medical statements home, and of course a direct exam showed him nicely suited for the army. They were inducted by noon that day, and on their way to camp by dinner time.

They left that sign on the door. The sign that puzzled so very many people, even to the "God Bless America" on it. For Mike and Mort were as little known for their religious leanings as they'd been for their patriotic urgings.

Relatives of the two, I am told, disposed of the store's stock and equipment. Mort didn't discuss any of that in the short note he left for me before leaving with Mike.

"Dear Chum:

Of course when you get a message like we got, and are told to pass it along personally to the two jerks it was intended for, there's nothing else you can do. We'll see that it gets to Adolf and Benito—for Gabriel's boss. Mort & Mike."

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 111, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

Advertisement

DEATH MAKES A

WHEN Reggie Van Fiddler sauntered into the cool somber depths of the Midland Club's lobby, he was feeling in an exceptionally amiable mood. There was a song in his heart and a bland, dreamily vague smile on his long, narrow face.

This state of blissful tranquility could be attributed to the fact that Reggie's tan and white shoes were taking him directly toward the Club Bar, where he planned to while away the day sipping various long, cool drinks. . And Reggie was always happy when the immediate future held the prospects of a drink.

He nodded brightly to a uniformed attendant.

"Glorious morning, isn't he?" he said.

"It was a glorious morning," the attendant corrected politely.

Reggie looked blankly at a clock on the wall and a puzzled frown spread

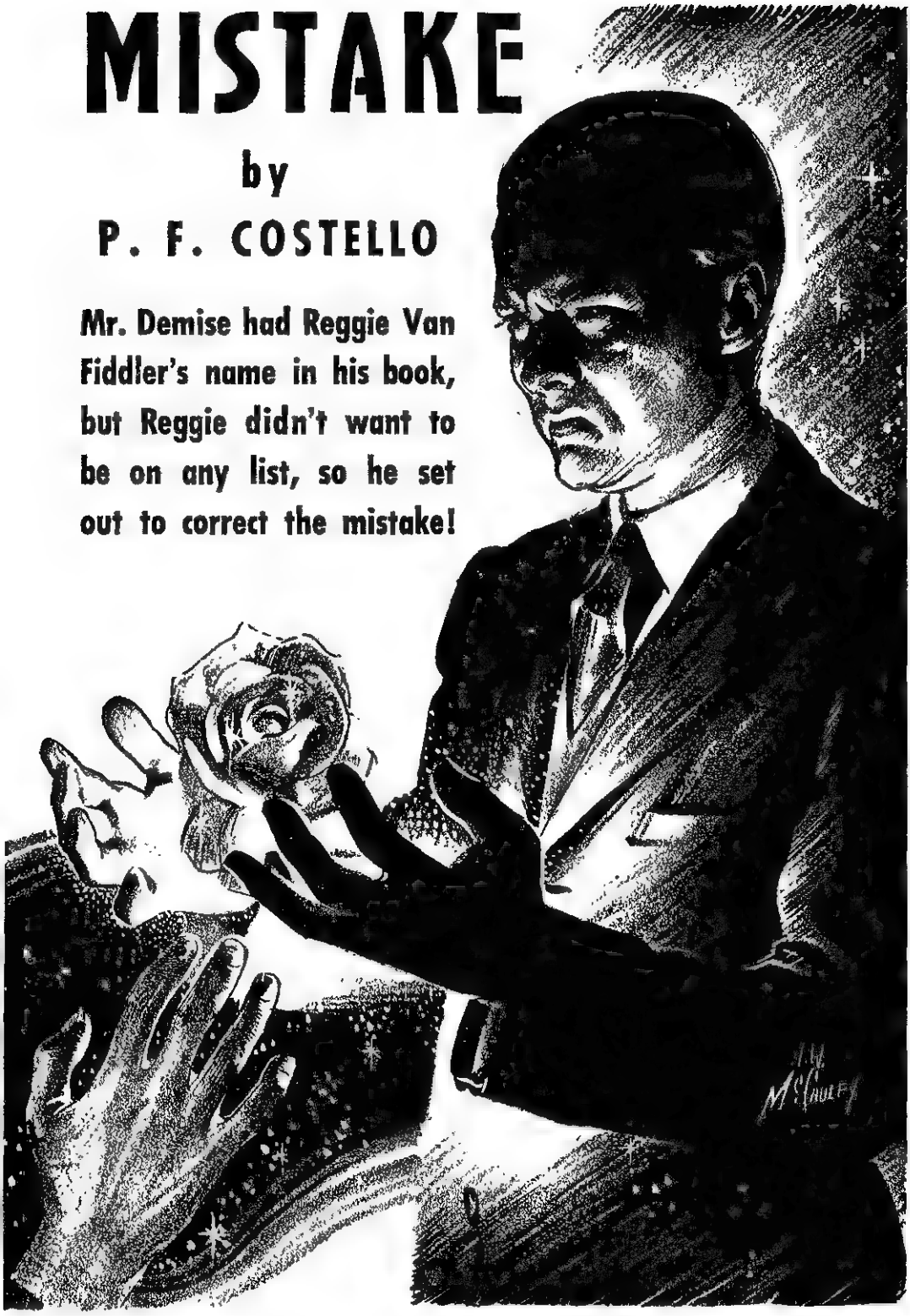
Reggie looked at the seared rose, and then he knew . . . !

MISTAKE

by

P. F. COSTELLO

Mr. Demise had Reggie Van Fiddler's name in his book, but Reggie didn't want to be on any list, so he set out to correct the mistake!



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over his equine features.

"Well, well," he muttered, shaking his head, "how'd that happen?" He sauntered on toward the bar, nibbling at a hang nail. The morning had slipped away from him somehow. Here it was two o'clock in the afternoon already. It was quite a blow.

He remembered then that he had slept until twelve thirty and he brightened considerably. That explained it. Whistling merrily he strode on into the dim cool bar, with its heavy brown fixtures and solid atmosphere of masculinity.

The bartender set up his usual drink and with knowledge born of long experience, immediately began the preparation of a second.

Reggie sipped his drink and relaxed.

For several moments he stood at the bar, lazily contented, his brain slowed to about one revolution per minute. Finally he happened to glance toward the end of the bar and he noticed a small, dark, narrow-eyed man watching him closely.

Reggie smiled uncertainly and returned to his drink. The dark man at the end of the bar was the only other customer and Reggie knew that he was not a member of the club, for he had never seen him before in his life.

Reggie finished his drink and when the bartender set another before him he glanced again toward the end of the bar. The little dark man was still there, regarding him, it seemed, with a steady fixed stare.

Reggie coughed nervously and gulped his drink. There was something in the dark little man's beady-eyed gaze that disturbed him. He had another quick drink and peeked from the corner of his eye at the little dark man.

There was something sinister about the chap, he felt sure. Reggie was the owner of an extremely lurid imagination and now, warmed by the glow of alcohol, he began to envision all sorts of wild possibilities.

After his fourth drink he was certain that the man was an Axis agent. Just why an Axis agent would be staring at him he had no idea, but he still felt sure the man was a Nazi.

REGGIE finished his drink and set the glass on the bar. Then he casually sauntered toward the door. A few paces from the room's only exit, he paused and under the pretense of inspecting a faded sports print on the wall, sneaked a quick glance at the dark little man.

The dark little man was still staring at him with narrowed, shaded eyes.

Reggie yawned ostentatiously and inched closer to the door. He was going to make a break for it, but it would have to be fast and clever. His heart was pounding with more gusto than usual and there were bright spots of excitement in his pale cheeks. This new role of dodging the Gestapo appealed enormously to his comic strip sense of melodrama.

Headlines popped before his mind's eye.

REGGIE VAN FIDDLER MAKES ESCAPE!

From what he was going to escape he wasn't quite sure, but he felt that the details would be in the body of the news story. Headlines didn't tell everything, did they?

Within a foot of the door he turned casually and took one last look at the little man who was staring so intently at him. Then, with a sudden slithering motion, he slipped through the door.

He collided heavily with a small figure.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "I'm in a bit of a hurry."

He turned and started away, but he had barely taken three strides when he jerked to a stop. An expression of dazed amazement stole over his face and his sleepy eyes opened wide.

Wheeling suddenly he stared back at the small figure he had collided with. The man was still standing in the corridor that led from the bar, regarding Reggie with a fixed, thoughtful expression.

And he was the same dark little man Reggie had left *inside* the bar room seconds before!

Reggie gulped audibly. His adam's apple bobbed in his throat like a mouse in a sock.

How had the dark little man gotten out of the bar ahead of him?

Reggie didn't know and he had no inclination to wait and ask questions. With one last incredulous look over his shoulder he wheeled and loped across the lobby, down the marble steps, through the club's revolving doors and into the street.

He walked swiftly, mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

The experience had been an unnerving one. When he reached the end of the block he hailed a cab and gave the driver the address of another bar.

As the cab rolled across the Loop Reggie settled back and gnawed nervously at his finger nails. Thoughtful meditation and analysis were not his strongest suits; in fact any thinking at all was an annoying chore to him, but he felt now that he had better bend his brain to the problem of the dark little man whom he'd seen at the club.

The chap was obviously interested in him, but why? There was no reasonable answer to that question, and there was no explanation to the way the little fellow had popped up *outside* the bar, when Reggie had seen him, a split-second before, *inside* the bar.

REGGIE was still stewing over these matters when the cab came to a stop before a swanky glitter joint which catered to afternoon revellers and jitterbugs of both sexes.

Inside the smoky, dimly lighted den of din and discord Reggie forgot his troubles long enough to order a drink, his fifth of the afternoon. He was conscious of a vague buzzing between his ears and there was a pleasant mellow glow in the region of his solar plexus.

Had it not been for his disturbing experience at the Midland club, he would have been feeling very, very fine.

When his drink arrived he sipped it appreciatively and glanced about the crowded bar, looking for a familiar face. In one corner of the room he saw a tall young man in tweeds lounging against the wall with a drink in his hand. With a glad cry Reggie scrambled from his bar stool and lurched across the crowded floor, weaving his way with drunken dexterity through the jitterbugging maniacs.

"Hi!" he cried, when he reached the tweed-clad young man's side. "How've you been, Ricky? Have a drink?"

"Been fine," the young man answered. "Got a drink. Name isn't Ricky."

"Not Ricky?" Reggie shook his head frowning. "Could've sworn you were good old Ricky Davis, chap I knew at school. Well, how're things?"

"Good," the young man answered. "Have a drink?"

"Got one," Reggie said. "Got to go now. It's been nice seeing you again, Ricky."

He started to weave his way back to the bar. Suddenly he stopped, his eyes focusing in fascination on the figure of a man at the bar. A man who had appropriated the seat which Reggie had vacated.

The man was small and dark. His

eyes were narrow and inscrutable. He was the same person Reggie had seen at the club.

The breath left Reggie's lungs in a rush.

Obviously the man had followed him here!

As he stood, transfixed, in the middle of the floor, the man turned and looked straight at him, a peculiar thoughtful expression on his dark face. After studying Reggie for a long interval he turned slowly back to the bar.

Reggie swallowed what was left of his drink in one gulp, but the liquor had no effect on him. After the shock he'd received it would take liquid dynamite to bolster him up.

He reeled back to the tall young man who was leaning against the wall.

"Ricky!" he cried hoarsely. "I'm being followed. Axis agents are after me."

"Name isn't Ricky," the tall young man said. "Why?"

"Why what?" Reggie said blankly. He seemed to have fumbled the conversational ball. He wished the young man would speak with more clarity and add a few articles and pronouns to his sentences.

"Why are they following you?" the young man said peevishly. "Nothing better to do?"

"That's just it," Reggie said. "I don't know why I'm being followed. But everywhere I go this little man sticks to me like a postage stamp."

"Where is he now?"

Reggie pointed dramatically at the dark little man.

"At the bar. He took the stool I left. He's right between that fat old man and that young girl with the red hair."

THE tweed-clad young man stared in the direction of Reggie's pointing finger, then he frowned and glanced down at Reggie.

"Any pink elephants, yet?"

"I'm not drunk," Reggie said indignantly. "That man has been following me like a conga partner all afternoon."

The tall young man patted Reggie patiently on the shoulder.

"Sleep and rest will make a new man of you," he said. "Go home. Go to bed. You've got hallucinations."

"Hallucinations!" Reggie cried over the din of the orchestra. "What do you mean? Don't you see the man I mean? Right between the fat old man and the girl with the red hair?"

The tweedish young man shook his head.

"The stool between the fat old man and the red-haired girl is completely unoccupied," he said in the patient voice of a man instructing a very young child.

Reggie shook his head bewilderedly. There was a sudden cold hollow in the pit of his stomach. He opened and closed his mouth several times without producing a sound.

"Are you serious?" he finally managed to gasp.

"Certainly," the young man answered. "There's no one on the bar stool you left. You're just seeing things. Take my advice and go home. You've had too much giggle water."

Reggie set his drink down hastily. For a long deliberate moment he studied the back of the dark little man at the bar. Then he shook his head dazedly. Maybe this was all some wild product of his imagination. Maybe he *was* having hallucinations . . .

He shook his head again and then he shook hands with the young man in the tweed suit.

"I'm going home, Ricky," he said firmly. "Say hello to all the gang for me."

"Name isn't Ricky," the young man said, sipping from his drink, "but I'll tell the boys you were asking."

"Good," Reggie said.

He left the crowded bar by a back entrance. The warm sunshine was pleasant and reassuring. People hurried past him, traffic surged in the streets, and everything was quite normal. He breathed a deep sigh and hailed a cab. He gave the driver the address of his apartment and then settled back against the soft leather cushions.

Sleep was all he needed. That was all.

WHEN he reached his apartment on the near North Side he had succeeded in convincing himself that his peculiar experiences of the afternoon were only products of his fevered imagination.

As he let himself into his apartment he had firmly resolved to strictly ration his reading of comic strips and spy magazines. They were pretty strong meat if they weren't handled with discretion.

The pleasantly furnished living room of his apartment was shrouded in late-afternoon semi-darkness and, when he closed and locked the door behind him, he switched on the lights.

The first thing he saw when he walked into the room was the little dark man whom he'd seen at the Club and at the bar a few minutes previously.

The dark little man was sitting in a straight chair, his hands resting on his knees. There was a faint smile on his face as he studied Reggie with calm, inscrutable eyes.

Reggie staggered back a few steps, clapping one hand hysterically to his forehead. He couldn't believe his eyes. He had left this man at a bar in the Loop, but here he was now, sitting calmly and unconcernedly in the living room of his apartment.

"How did you get in here?" he gasped.

The dark little man stood up and smiled.

"Is that important?" he asked softly. "I am here and that is all that matters."

Reggie swallowed loudly. There was something disturbing about the calm ambiguity of the man's statement. He rubbed his damp palms together nervously.

"Can I get you a drink?" he blurted.

The dark little man shook his head slowly.

Reggie looked at him uneasily, noticing him in detail for the first time. He was small, hardly more than five feet two and he was slenderly built. His hair was jet black and it combed straight back from a high, delicate forehead. He wore severely tailored black clothes that fitted his small frame without a wrinkle. But his eyes dominated his entire personality, for they were a cold chilling black, lusterless and unwinking, as unrevealing as twin diamonds.

Reggie shivered slightly and looked wistfully toward the door of the apartment. He coughed nervously.

"Sorry to seem rude," he said, laughing weakly, "but I've got to be toddling off now. It's been nice—er— running into you. There are magazines on the table, liquor in the ice box, so just make yourself at home."

He backed cautiously toward the door, smiling nervously.

"Don't wait up for me," he said. "I've—"

"Wait," the dark little man said quietly, "I must talk with you."

"Some other time," Reggie said, feeling behind him for the door knob. "Awfully rushed just now. Sorry but—"

"Wait!" the little man said again, but this time his voice cracked like a whip. "Didn't you hear me? I must talk with you?"

REGGIE jumped at the cracking tone of the man's voice. His hand jerked away from the door knob as if it were red hot.

"Oh, you want to talk to me?" he said foolishly. "I didn't understand you."

"My name," the little man said, "is," he paused and smiled cryptically, "Demise."

"Glad to know you," Reggie said. "My name is—"

"I know your name," Mr. Demise said. "I know everything about you, Reginald Van Fiddler. I know things about you that you don't know yourself."

"Do you now?" Reggie said, becoming interested in spite of himself. "For instance?"

"I know that you are about to take a long trip," Mr. Demise said.

"That's not news," Reggie said. "My draft board just classified me 1-A. I'll be taking a long trip very shortly."

"That is not the trip I am referring to," Mr. Demise said. "You are going on a trip with me."

Reggie blinked. He couldn't think of anyone with whom he would rather *not* take a trip than this dark, sinister little man who called himself Mr. Demise. What did Demise mean, anyway?

"It's nice of you, and all that," he said, "but I don't think I'll be able to make it. My draft board might not like it."

"They will understand," Mr. Demise said.

"I don't know about that," Reggie said. He was beginning really to worry. There was something damnably inevitable about Mr. Demise's calm statements. "They're pretty ticklish about such things. I think we'd just better forget the whole idea."

"That is impossible," Mr. Demise said.

Reggie rubbed his moist palms on his trouser legs.

"Who are you?" he asked hesitantly. "Have you been following me around all day just to sell me on the idea of a trip? Are you from Cook's tours?"

Mr. Demise smiled and shook his head.

"I am not interested in selling you the idea of a trip. I am simply telling you that you are going on a trip. I have already made all the arrangements. There is nothing that can possibly change them."

"Where am I going?" Reggie asked. His voice was a whisper.

"With me," Mr. Demise said.

"That's no answer," Reggie said, clutching at straws. "Who are you? Where are you going?"

Mr. Demise smiled again, very faintly. He walked slowly to the mantelpiece and plucked a rose from a vase. His hand closed gently over the flower as he turned to face Reggie.

"Perhaps this will answer your questions," he said softly.

He opened his hand and dropped the flower to the floor at Reggie's feet. Reggie's eyes widened in sheer amazement.

For the soft glowing beauty of the flower was faded forever. It lay on the floor, a blackened, dead reminder of its former glory.

"It's dead," he said incredulously. "It withered at the touch of your hand."

MR. DEMISE nodded slowly and there was a wistful sadness in his face.

"All living things die at my touch," he said. "For I am Death!"

"Death!" Reggie echoed. For an in-

stant he stared blankly at Mr. Demise. "Death!" he repeated. "Why that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard." He actually felt a sensation of relief in the realization that he'd been entertaining some loony instead of an Axis agent as he'd feared. "You're off your trolley," he said to Mr. Demise. "You'd better get moving before your keeper finds you. Death! What a gag!"

"I assure you it is not a gag," Mr. Demise said slowly. "Your time is near at hand and I have been sent to take you to the land of Darkness."

"Think again, chum," Reggie said emphatically. "I'm not going to Harlem with you or anyone else and that's final."

"It is useless to protest," Mr. Demise said. "Your destiny is sealed. You must come with me."

"You are plain balmy," Reggie said. "I've never heard a sillier yarn in my life. So you're Death, are you?"

Mr. Demise nodded. "I am one of his agents."

"Changing your story a little, aren't you?" Reggie said triumphantly. "Well, since when has Death been announced by personal messengers? A man steps in front of a car. He's killed. That's all there is to it. There aren't little black men standing on the curb pushing him into the street, are there? And they don't come around a couple of hours in advance tipping him off, do they? No!"

"When a mortal passes over," Mr. Demise said, "there is always an agent of Death present superintending the details. But he is not always visible to his charge."

Reggie poured himself a drink and lit a cigarette.

"Well, thanks just the same," he said, "but I don't want any special effects when I pass over. If there's a messenger of Death around I don't *want* to see him. Just let him stay invisible. That's the way I want it."

Mr. Demise looked slightly pained. There was an embarrassed look on his normally expressionless features.

"Usually the agent of Death is invisible," he said. "In fact his orders are to remain invisible under all circumstances."

"Okay then," Reggie said. "You're breaking orders. Be a nice obedient chum now and fade away."

Mr. Demise shrugged and stepped backward—*and suddenly he was gone!* He had disappeared into thin air, soundlessly, instantaneously.

"Why what?" Reggie said blandly. He started to sip his drink when suddenly the full realization of what had happened burst on him. The drink fell from his nerveless fingers with a crash.

He stared frantically about the room.

Mr. Demise was gone! It was incredible! It was unbelievable! But it was a fact!

He poured himself another drink and drained it in one breathless gulp. He felt his reason tottering as his gaze swung desperately about the room.

"Mr. Demise!" he cried. "Come back! Where are you!"

"I am here before you," Mr. Demise's voice sounded in the air. "Are you convinced now?"

Reggie mopped his forehead weakly.

"Yes," he gasped. "I'm convinced."

MR. DEMISE reappeared as suddenly as he had vanished. He smiled faintly at Reggie. He was apparently completely unruffled by his transformation.

Reggie poured himself another drink with trembling fingers.

"D—don't do that any more," he pleaded.

"As you wish," Mr. Demise said

agreeably. "I am sorry if I shocked you. I can see now that it was a mistake to let you see me in the first place. I understand now why it is strictly forbidden."

Reggie drained his drink.

"I wish you hadn't decided to break regulations," he said moodily. "I've never been so upset in all my life. Why didn't you remain invisible, if you're supposed to? You aren't going to creep into people's hearts if you pop up and announce yourself as an agent of Death and start making speeches about whisking them off to the Land of Darkness. People just don't like that sort of thing. By all means stay invisible in the future."

Mr. Demise shuffled awkwardly and for the first time his poise seemed deserting him.

"You're absolutely right," he said gloomily. "But I was curious."

"That's a fine excuse," Reggie said scathingly. "I should think they'd get a man of tact and diplomacy for your job. Not some nosy person whose curiosity runs away with him."

"You see," Mr. Demise explained miserably, "you happened to be my first assignment. I've had no experience at all in this work and I was curious to see what kind of person I was going to take back with me. And I wanted to get a first-hand reaction from you."

Reggie mixed himself another drink. He was beginning to feel belligerent.

"So?" he cried. "They sent an amateur down to get me, did they? I suppose I don't rate an experienced escort. So they sent you. I'm surprised they didn't just tell the office boy to do the job."

"Your levity is poor taste," Mr. Demise observed frigidly. "I can assure you that I am perfectly qualified to act as your guide to the Other World. I have studied hard to perfect myself for my work and I was considered one of the outstanding pupils in the class which just graduated. You do not have to relieve your spite by making slighting references to my professional ability."

"Bah!" Reggie said. "If you have any professional ability it hasn't been noticeable so far. You're just out of some college, aren't you? You talk like a college boy. You don't make sense."

Mr. Demise looked hurt.

"I'm sorry you're taking this attitude," he said. "I had hoped we could be friends."

"Friends!" Reggie shrieked. "Am I expected to be friendly with some ghoul who comes prowling around threatening to whisk me off to Eternity? What more do they expect of me? To pay my own way too, I suppose."

"Your passage will be taken care of at the other end," Mr. Demise said. "Since you have taken such an ungracious stand we will not dally further."

"NOW wait a minute," Reggie said. He felt his throat getting dry. The prospects of Death were not pleasant. He didn't want to die right now. He had things to do. There was that badminton match next week with Snuffy Smith. . .

"Can't we put this thing off a while?" he asked hopefully. "There's no sense in rushing things, I always say. Why don't you go off and get yourself a lot of experience and then come back for me?"

"That is impossible," Mr. Demise said flatly. He drew from his inside coat pocket a slim black book which he opened to the first page. "You are first on my list and I must carry out my orders to the letter. All the information as to person, place and method is contained in this book and it would be impossible to change it."

"Place and method, eh?" Reggie said weakly. He ran a finger around the inside of his collar. "You mean you've got the dope there on how it's going to happen and when it's going to happen?"

"Certainly," Mr. Demise replied. "We don't use a hit-or-miss method. Everything is worked out to a science. You, for instance, are—" Mr. Demise paused and shook his head. "No," he continued, "I can't tell you. That is also against instructions."

"You haven't paid much attention to instructions so far," Reggie said sulkily. "Can't you give me a hint as to how I'm going to get it?"

Mr. Demise shook his head firmly.

"That would be an unthinkable breach of conduct," he said, shaking his head severely and frowning. "Absolutely unthinkable."

"All right," Reggie said resignedly. There was no point, he realized, in arguing with this inhuman icicle. "But let's have a drink before we get down to—er—business."

"I am not allowed to drink while on duty," Mr. Demise said primly.

"For gosh sakes," Reggie said disgustedly, "you weren't thinking about your precious orders and regulations when you followed me around, scaring the hell out of me. Oh no! That was all right. But when I ask you to do a little something outside the letter of your instructions it's no soap. If there's anything fair in that I can't see it."

Mr. Demise shuffled uncomfortably.

"It was indiscreet of me to allow you to see me," he said thoughtfully. "Perhaps your objection is justifiable. It might square things a bit if I would take a drink with you. Not that I would expect to enjoy the stuff but it seems the fair thing to do."

"Fine," Reggie said.

He mixed two drinks in somber silence. Because he realized that it was probably the last time he would ever perform that pleasant chore, he put his heart and soul into the task and when he finally handed Mr. Demise his drink it was a veritable masterpiece.

Mr. Demise drank the drink—it was a double Martini with a splash of Quantro—in one long appreciative gulp. He set the glass down and sighed contentedly.

"Another?" Reggie suggested hopefully.

"No," Mr. Demise said, "one is plenty. As a matter of fact," he said, "that's the first drink I ever had. Alcohol is one of our finest helpers but we aren't supposed to touch it. Personally I think its intoxicating effect is greatly overrated."

REGGIE leaned forward and there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"So that was your first drink, eh?" he asked. "And you don't feel anything?"

"Not a thing," said Mr. Demise. "Of course I notice a certain glow, but that's all."

"Just a certain glow, eh?" Reggie said.

"Thash all," Mr. Demise said. He sat down suddenly. "And my tongue ish a lil' thick."

"Well, that's only natural," Reggie said. He mixed another drink and there was a cryptic smile on his lips. "Alcohol is a peculiar thing. One drink will addle a person's wits and the second will act as an antidote. Strange, isn't it?"

Mr. Demise rocked slightly in the chair. His coal-black eyes were a bit glazed. "Ish very strange," he conceded.

"Possibly you'd like to try the antidote?" Reggie said casually.

"Might not be a bad idea," said Mr. Demise.

Reggie handed him the second drink and watched contentedly as Mr. Demise drank it down. Mr. Demise set down the glass.

"You wush right," he said, slumping against the back of the chair. "Absolutely right. Second drink ish an antidote. Jush what I needed."

"Absolutely," Reggie agreed solemnly.

Mr. Demise closed his eyes but he opened them almost immediately. He struggled up to a sitting position.

"I hash something to do," he muttered. His hand groped into the inside of his coat, returned with the slim black book. "Very important," he mumbled. "First assignment. Can't have any slip ups."

Reggie moistened his lips nervously. He eyed the little black book carefully. That might be the way. . . .

"How about another drink, old boy," he said heartily. He mixed one quickly, handed it to Mr. Demise. Mr. Demise took it in his left hand and Reggie deftly plucked the black book from his right hand. Mr. Demise appeared not to notice the exchange. He drank the drink methodically.

Reggie tossed the book under a coffee table.

Mr. Demise climbed unsteadily to his feet.

Reggie took him by the arm. "What say we go out and have a few quick antidotes?" he suggested.

Mr. Demise nodded stupidly. He mumbled something unintelligible and allowed Reggie to lead him to the door. Reggie's brain was working at full speed. If he could just ditch Mr. Demise and get back to the book everything might be saved. His idea was sheer brilliance. . . .

THEIR first destination was a bar. Reggie found a cab, shoved Mr. Demise inside and ordered the driver to one of the dozens of friendly bars with which he was familiar.

At the first stop Mr. Demise had two more drinks. When he had drained the second Reggie hauled him to his feet and started for another palate palace. His object was to keep Mr. Demise so bewildered and drunk that he would forget his job.

For a while he succeeded. Mr. Demise followed him helplessly from bar to bar and sat tottering on high stools happily pouring fiery intoxicants into his already overburdened stomach.

But finally he reached the state of saturation where the liquor produced a steadily diminishing effect. Reggie watched him worriedly and ordered more and more drinks.

But it was no use.

In spite of the enormous quantities of liquor he had consumed, Mr. Demise was slowly sobering up. His face was losing its blank expression and an intelligent gleam was creeping back into his eyes.

He began to fumble uncertainly through his pockets, a worried expression settling over his features.

Reggie slapped him on the back resoundingly.

"Have a drink!" he shouted into his ear.

Mr. Demise shook his head stubbornly.

"Got a job to do," he muttered. He went slowly through his pockets and an expression of horror replaced the worried look on his face.

"Where's my book?" he gasped. "I've lost my book! This is terrible. I've got to find it!"

"What book?" Reggie asked innocently.

"The book with all the names and places and dates and methods," Mr. Demise moaned. "I've lost it."

Reggie shrugged philosophically.

"Too bad," he said. "But things are never as black as they seem. Maybe it'll turn up somewhere. The thing to do is just sit tight until someone finds it and reports it."

"I can't wait," wailed Mr. Demise. "These things have to happen on schedule. There'd be an awful rumpus in the complaint department if I started sending people up there haphazardly. And I don't even remember whom I've got on the list. You're the only one I'm sure of."

Reggie choked on his drink.

"Yes," Mr. Demise went on obliviously, "you're the first. I'm sure of that much. And I'd better send you along right away. I'll do that much correctly, at least."

"Now, just a minute," Reggie said, "how're you sure you've got me right? I looked at that book and I don't think I'm the man you want at all."

"You looked at the book!" cried Mr. Demise with sudden suspicion. "So that's where it went. That's why you got me drunk. You stole my book, hoping to evade your destiny, didn't you?"

"Nothing of the sort," Reggie said, forcing a note of outraged indignation into his voice.

"Yes you did," Mr. Demise said. "I'm not going to wait a second longer in your case. Mr. Fiddler, prepare yourself for a long trip and don't plan on coming back."

REGGIE realized that the jig was up. Mr. Demise had a grim business-like note in his voice and there was no hope of prolonging things further. Drastic action was needed, not discussion.

With a leap like a startled gazelle Reggie left his stool and bounded for the door. Before Mr. Demise could turn around, he was in the street, shouting frantically for a cab.

A cab pulled to the curb and Reggie leaped into its dark interior. Over his shoulder he saw Mr. Demise stagger from the bar, a wrathful expression stamped on his dark features.

The cab started away with a roar. Reggie shouted his address at the driver and squirmed about to peek out the rear window.

He saw Mr. Demise clambering into another cab.

"Hurry!" he shouted to his driver.

"Life or death, eh?" the cabby said conversationally.

Reggie winced. "You said it."

The cab caromed around corners, hit the Outer Drive and hurled along like a frightened cotton-tail until it reached the near North side, where it swung west and sped through the labyrinthine streets that led to Reggie's apartment.

From the rear window Reggie could see Mr. Demise's cab speeding after them, steadily closing the gap. His palms were moist and the effects of the liquor had completely faded, leaving him horribly sober. There was nothing funny about this predicament.

His cab jolted to a stop and Reggie threw a bill at the driver and leaped out and raced into the foyer of his building.

By a miraculous stroke of luck the elevator was not in use. He slammed the door and jabbed the button and the car started upward with a jerk. He breathed a long shuddering sigh of relief. Maybe there would yet be time . . .

The elevator stopped at his floor. Just as he opened the door and stepped out, the elevator suddenly dropped back down the shaft. One of his legs dangled down the shaft. With a startled squawk he pulled himself onto the floor landing.

Mr. Demise obviously meant business. If he'd been in that elevator everything would be all over now. As it was he still had a chance.

He let himself into his apartment, switched on the light and dove underneath the coffee table. The black book of doom was still there. Frantically Reggie opened it to the first page, found his own name.

He jerked a pencil from his pocket . . .

He was still scribbling furiously when the door of the apartment banged open and Mr. Demise strode into the room, his face black as a thundercloud.

Reggie dropped the pencil and hid the book from view with his body.

"So!" Mr. Demise cried. "You would try to escape?"

He raised both hands commandingly in the air.

Before he could move again Reggie wheeled about.

"Just a minute," he shrieked. He held out the slim black book to Mr. Demise. "I was sure a mistake had been made. Here! Look for yourself."

"I want no more of your tricks," Mr. Demise warned ominously.

"This is no trick," Reggie said. "You should be grateful to me for catching the error in time."

MR. DEMISE took the book from Reggie and examined it carefully. The frown gradually faded from his face as his eyes lingered on the page. He shuffled his feet awkwardly and cleared his throat.

"It seems," he said in a small, chastened voice, "that a mistake has been made."

Reggie's heart pounded with hope.

"It certainly has," he said. "This entire affair should be reported to someone. That's what happens when you put inexperienced men on the job. You wind up with a bungled mess."

"I don't know how it happened," Mr. Demise said miserably. "All I can say is I'm sorry."

"Fine thing," Reggie said stuffily. "Mess up your job like this and then say you're sorry. I'd advise, Demise, that you lay off the liquor when you're supposed to be working."

"I will in the future," Mr. Demise said humbly.

"See that you do," Reggie said sternly. "Now I'd say you'd better get to work on that first assignment."

"Yes, I will," Mr. Demise said. With drooping shoulders he moved slowly to the door. With his hand on the knob he turned again to Reggie.

"I hate to be a pest," he said, "but I'm afraid I don't know how to go about this job. Maybe you could help me. Where can I find this fellow?"

Reggie chuckled and began to mix himself a drink.

"I'd advise you to try Berchtesgaden," he said. "Just ask anyone you meet. They'll tell you where you can find Adolf Hitler."

"Thank you," Mr. Demise said gratefully. "I won't slip up on this one."

"See that you don't," Reggie said.

MYTH OF THE WATERMELON

DR. ORLAND E. WHITE of the University of Virginia reports his experiments on the native land of our favorite summer treat, watermelon. He believes Africa is the native home, not America, of this fruit.

Watermelons were not known at either the Epicurean feasts of ancient Greece nor the Lucullan banquets of Rome. Not until the great age of exploration in the sixteenth century do they appear in the world picture Dr. White believes that the Portuguese, pushing southward along the coast of Africa, became acquainted with the ancestors of modern watermelons growing wild in South Africa. They soon transferred them to their colony of Brazil, where the Indians adopted them and added them to their own crops Thus the myth of an American origin of watermelons came into being.

AMAZING FACTS

By A. MORRIS

Odd bits of truth exist in our daily life which are perhaps even more amazing than fiction itself

450 MILES PER GALLON

WHO would worry about gas rationing if our car would do 450 miles to the gallon? Petroleum technologists say gasoline is sufficiently powerful to propel a car 450 miles to the gallon, if (here's the catch) means could be devised to obtain complete efficiency of consumption.

With fourteen gallons of gasoline a new model of any popular make car could do 6,300 miles at twenty miles per hour on a perfectly level road, provided there were no power losses through friction, heat radiation, wind resistance, and a few other factors.

The trouble is not in the gasoline, one gallon of which contains 90,000,000 foot-pounds of potential power, but in the difficulty of building vehicles and highways which will permit complete advantage to be taken of this dynamic fuel.

* * *

SWISS GOITER TROUBLE

FISH and foods containing a lot of iodine are usually prescribed to prevent goiter in humans, but how about the poor animals?

Goiter, long known as a human affliction especially prevalent in some parts of the Alps, is now found to be an ailment of the Swiss game animals as well. Deer, chamoix and hares have been found with pronounced goitrous swellings, which upon dissection proved to be due to enlarged thyroid glands. The same condition was also found in frogs. It shows every indication of being genuine goiter, due to lack of iodine in the soil and thus in the animal's food.

Serious calcium and magnesium deficiencies are indicated by another deficiency disease found in other parts of the mountains. Skulls of chamoix and other game animals were abnormally thin-boned. Because of these abnormal deficiencies in the Alps, the chamoix tend to congregate near the bases of the mountains, where lime is more abundant in the soil water, and in these sites the animals are healthy and normal.

* * *

NEXT TRIP 1961

ON FEBRUARY 20, 1941, the planet Jupiter passed the planet Saturn. This passing will not again take place between the two planets until the early part of 1961.

Jupiter moves around the sun every 5.20 years, at a speed of 8 miles per second. Saturn, farther out, takes 29.46 years to encircle its orbit, with a speed of about 6 miles per second. About every twenty years Jupiter overtakes Saturn in their never-ending race.

Since our own planet is in motion, the paths of the planets are quite complicated. Earth travels at the rate of 18.5 miles per second. Regularly, therefore, we overtake the outer ones, and as we go past they seem to go backwards for a time. This is called "retrograde" motion by astronomers.

* * *

FIRST IN THE DRUG LINE

AMERICA'S first wholesale druggist in the modern sense of the phrase was Andrew Craigie, army apothecary during the Revolutionary War, 1776, who managed a laboratory in which medicines for military hospitals and the army were prepared. After the war, Craigie entered the wholesale drug business; a century before his time.

Also, about the same time, the firm of Christopher, Jr., and Charles Marshall, wholesale and retail druggists in Philadelphia started making ammonium chloride and Glauber's salts on an extensive scale. They were probably the first to produce pharmaceutical chemicals on a large scale in this country.

* * *

"ELEMENTAL" AUTO

MOST of us know there are 92 known elements, but how many of us know that nearly half of them are used in an automobile?

* * *

TWO NEW STARS DISCOVERED

DR. WALTER S. ADAMS, director of the Mt. Wilson Observatory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, reports that Dr. Adriaan van Maanen has found two more nearby stars, raising the number of stars found within 5 parsecs (16.3 light years) of the sun to 37.

They are faint stars known by their catalog numbers as Ras 128 and Luyten 789-6. The distance of the former is 11.3 light years and of the latter 10.3 light years.

Among the 37 stars within 5 parsecs, Dr. van Maanen has found 13 companion stars associated with them.

It was tragedy! The house was in flames; the rats would escape . . .

Rats in the Belfry

by JOHN YORK CABOT

THIS LITTLE GUY Stoddard was one of the toughest customers I'd ever done business with. To look at him you'd think he was typical of the mild pleasant little sort of suburban home owner who caught the eight-oh-two six days a week and watered the lawn on the seventh. Physically, his appearance was completely that of the inconspicuous average citizen. Baldish, fortiesh, bespectacled, with the usual behind-the-desk bay window that most office workers get at his age, he looked like nothing more than the amiable citizen you see in comic cartoons on suburban life.

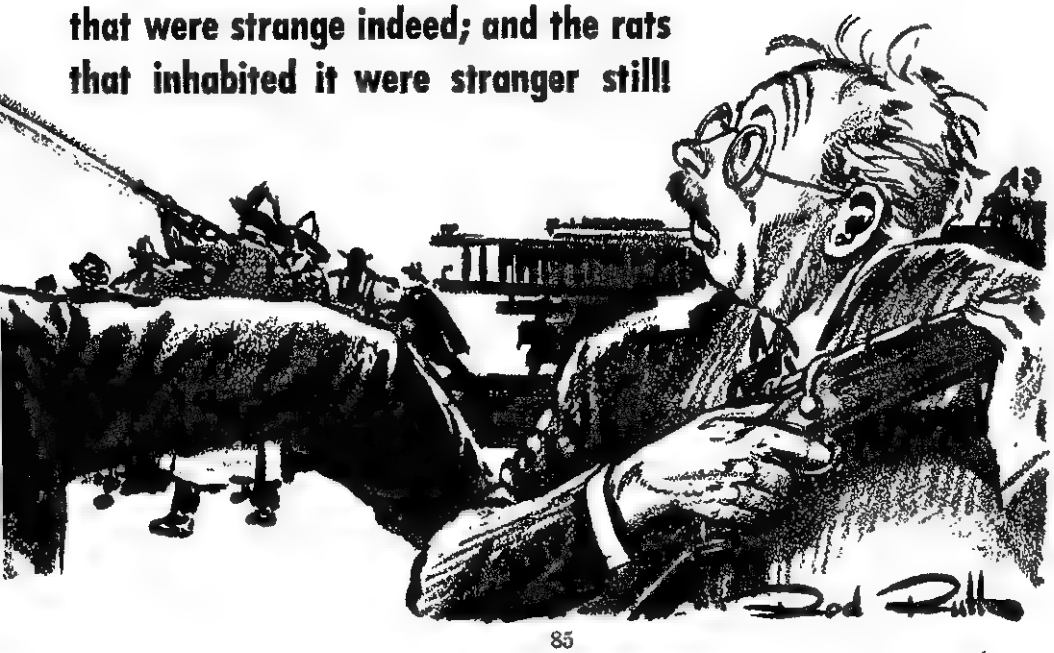
Yet, what I'm getting at is that this Stoddard's appearance was distinctly deceptive. He was the sort of customer that we in the contracting business would label as a combination grouser and eccentric.

When he and his wife came to me with plans for the home they wanted built in Mayfair's second subdivision, they were already full of ideas on exactly what they wanted.

This Stoddard—his name was George B. Stoddard in full—had painstakingly outlined about two dozen sheets of drafting paper with some of the craziest ideas you have ever seen.

"These specifications aren't quite down to the exact inchage, Mr. Kermit," Stoddard had admitted, "for I don't pretend to be a first class architectural draftsman. But my wife and I have had ideas on what sort of a house we

This house was built to specifications that were strange indeed; and the rats that inhabited it were stranger still!



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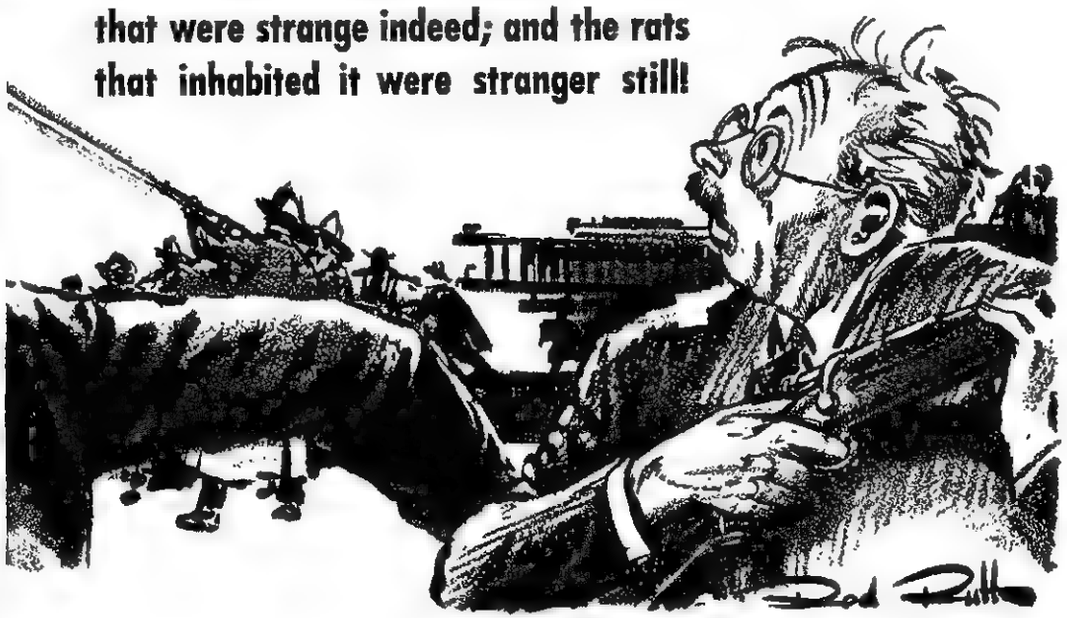


want for years, and these plans are the result of our years of decision."

I'd looked at the "plans" a little sickly. The house they'd decided on was a combination of every architectural nightmare known to man. It was the sort of thing a respectable contractor would envision if he ever happened to be dying of malaria fever.

I could feel them watching me as I went over their dream charts. Watching me for the first faint sign of disapproval or amusement or disgust on my face. Watching to snatch the "plans" away from me and walk out of my office if I showed any of those symtoms.

"Ummmhumm," I muttered noncommittally.

"What do you think of them, Kermit?" Stoddard demanded.

I had a hunch that they'd been to contractors other than me. Contractors who'd been tactless enough to offend them into taking their business elsewhere.

"You have something distinctly different in mind here, Mr. Stoddard," I answered evasively.

George B. Stoddard beamed at his wife, then back to me.

"Exactly, sir," he said. "It is our dream castle."

I shuddered at the expression. If you'd mix ice cream with pickles and beer and herring and lie down for a nap, it might result in a dream castle.

"It will be a difficult job, Mr. Stoddard," I said. "This is no ordinary job you've outlined here."

"I know that," said Stoddard proudly. "And I am prepared to pay for the extra special work it will probably require."

That was different. I perked up a little.

"I'll have to turn over these plans to my own draftsman," I told him, "before I can give you an estimate on the construction."

George B. Stoddard turned to his wife.

"I told you, Laura," he said, "that sooner or later we'd find a contractor with brains and imagination."

IT TOOK fully two months haggling over the plans with Stoddard and my own draftsmen before we were able to start work on the nightmare my clients called their dream castle. Two months haggling in an effort to make Stoddard relinquish some of his more outlandish ideas on his proposed dwelling. But he didn't budge an inch, and by the time we'd laid the foundation for the dream shack, every last building quirk he'd had originally on those "plans" still held.

I took a lot of ribbing from contractors in that vicinity once the word got round that I was building Stoddard's house for him. It seems that he'd been to them all before he got around to me.

But I didn't mind the ribbing much at first. Even though Stoddard was a barrel full of trouble hanging around the building lot with an eagle eye to see that nothing was omitted, I had already cashed his first few payment checks on the construction.

He'd meant what he said about his willingness to pay more for the extra trouble entailed in the mad construction pattern we had to follow, and I couldn't call him stingy with his extra compensation by a long shot.

Financially, I was doing nicely, thank you. Mentally, I was having the devil's own time with Stoddard.

He didn't know a damned thing about architecture or construction, of course. But he did know what he wanted. Good Lord, how he knew what he wanted!

"The basement boiler layout isn't

what I had on my plans!" he'd call me up to squawk indignantly.

"But it isn't greatly different the way we have it," I'd plead. "Besides, it's far safer than what you originally planned."

"Is it humanly possible to put it where I planned it?" my troublesome client would demand.

"Yes," I'd admit. "But saf—"

"Then put it where I planned it!" he would snap, hanging up. And, of course, I'd have to put it where he'd planned it.

The workmen on the job also presented a problem. They were getting fed up with Stoddard's snooping, and going crazy laying out patterns which were in absolute contradiction to sanity and good taste.

But in spite of all this, the monstrosity progressed.

If you can picture a gigantic igloo fronted by southern mansion pillars and dotted with eighteenth century gables, and having each wing done in a combination early Mexican and eastern Mosque style, you'll have just the roughest idea of what it was beginning to look like. For miles around, people were driving out to see that house in the evenings after construction men had left.

But the Stoddards were pleased. They were as happy about the whole mess as a pair of kids erecting a Tarzan dwelling in a tree. And the extra compensations I was getting for the additional trouble wasn't hurting me any.

I'LL NEVER forget the day when we completed the tiny belfry which topped off the monstrosity. Yes, a belfry. Just the kind you still see on little country churches and schoolhouses, only, of course a trifle different.

The Stoddards had come out to the lot to witness this momentous event; the completion, practically, of their dream child.

I was almost as happy as they were, for it stood as the symbol of the ending of almost all the grief for me.

My foreman came over to where I was standing with the Stoddards.

"You gonna put a bell in that belfry?" he asked.

George Stoddard looked at him as if he'd gone mad.

"What for?" he demanded.

"So you can *use* the belfry," the foreman said.

"Don't be so ridiculous, my good man," Stoddard snorted. "It will be of pleasurable use enough to us, just *looking* at it."

When the foreman had marched off, scratching his head, I turned to the Stoddards.

"Well, it's almost done," I said. "Pleased with it?"

Stoddard beamed. "You have no idea, Mr. Kermit," he said solemnly, "what a tremendous moment this is for my wife and me."

I looked at the plain, drab, smiling Laura Stoddard. From the shine in her eyes, I guess Stoddard meant what he said. Then I looked up at the belfry, and shuddered.

As I remarked before, even the belfry wasn't quite like any belfry human eyes had ever seen before. It angled in all the way around in as confusing a maze of geometrical madness you have ever seen. It was a patterned craziness, of course, having some rhyme to it, but no reason.

Looking at it, serenely topping that crazy-quilt house, I had the impression of its being an outrageously squashed cherry topping, the whipped cream of as madly a concocted sundae that a soda jerk ever made. A pleasant impresssion.

Stoddard's voice broke in on my

somewhat sickish contemplation.

"When will we be able to start moving in?" he asked eagerly.

"The latter part of next week," I told him. "We should have it set by then."

"Good," said Stoddard. "Splendid." He put his arm around his wife, and the two of them stared starry eyed at their home. It made a lump come to your throat, seeing the bliss in their eyes as they stood there together. It made a lump come into your throat, until you realized what they were staring at.

"Incidentally," I said casually, figuring now was as good a time as any to get them used to the idea. "The startlingly different construction pattern you've had us follow will result in, ah, minor repairs in the house being necessary from time to time. Remember my telling you that at the start?"

Stoddard nodded, brushing the information away casually.

"Yes, certainly I remember your saying something about that. But don't worry. I won't hold you responsible for any minor repairs which the unique construction causes."

"Thanks," I told him dryly. "I just wanted to make certain we had that point clear."

THE STODDARDS moved in just as soon as the last inch of work on their dream monster was finished. I paid off my men, banked a nice profit on the job, and went back to building actual houses again. I thought my troubles with the Stoddards at an end.

But of course I was wrong.

It was fully a month after the Stoddards had been in their madhouse that I got my first indignant telephone call from George B. Stoddard himself.

"Mr. Kermit," said the angry voice on the phone, "this is George B. Stoddard."

I winced at the name and the all too familiar voice, but managed to sound cheerfully friendly.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Stoddard," I oozed. "How are you and the Missus getting along in your dream castle?"

"That," said George B. Stoddard, "is what I called about. We have been having considerable difficulty for which I consider your construction men to be responsible."

"Now just a minute," I began. "I thought we agreed—"

"We agreed that I was to expect certain occasional minor repairs to be necessary due to the construction of the house," Stoddard broke in. "I know that."

"Then what's the trouble?" I demanded.

"This house is plagued with rats," said Stoddard angrily.

"Rats?" I echoed.

"Exactly!" my client snapped.

"But how could that be possible?" I demanded. "It's a brand new house, and rats don't—"

Stoddard broke in again. "The devil they don't. We have them, and it can't be due to any fault but those construction men of yours."

"How could it be their fault?" I was getting a little sore.

"Because it isn't my fault, nor my wife's. And the building, as you observed a minute ago, is practically new."

"Now listen," I began.

"I wish you'd come out here and see for yourself," Stoddard demanded.

"Have you caught any?"

"No," he answered.

"Have you seen any?" I demanded.

"No," Stoddard admitted, "but—"

This time I did the cutting in.

"Then how do you know you have rats?" I demanded triumphantly.

"Because," Stoddard almost shouted, "as I was going to tell you, I can hear

them, and my wife can hear them."

I hadn't thought of that. "Oh," I said. Then: "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am very sure. Now, will you please come out here and see what this is all about?" he demanded.

"Okay," I said. "Okay." And then I hung up and looked around for my hat. My visit wasn't going to be any fun, I knew. But what the hell. I had to admit that if Stoddard and his wife were hearing noises that sounded like rats, they had a legitimate squawk. For I built the house, and no amount of crazy ideas in its design by Stoddard could explain the presence of vermin.

BOTH the Stoddards met me at the door when I arrived out in the Mayfair subdivision where I'd built their monstrosity. As they led me into the living room, I caught a pretty good idea of their new home furnishings. They hadn't changed ideas, even to the mixing of a wild mess of various nations and periods in the junk they'd placed all around the house.

They led me past an early American library table to a deep Moroccan style couch, and both pulled up chairs of French and Dutch design before me.

Feeling thus surrounded by a small little circle of indignation, I began turning my hat around in my hands, staring uncomfortably at my surroundings.

"Nice place you've got here," I said.

"We know that," Stoddard declared, dismissing banalities. "But we'd best get immediately to the point."

"About the rats?" I asked.

"About the rats," said Stoddard. His wife nodded emphatically.

There was a silence. Maybe a minute passed. I cleared my throat.

"I thought you—" I began.

"Shhhh!" Stoddard hissed. "I want you to sit here and hear the noises, just as we have. Then you can draw your own conclusions. Silence, please."

So I didn't say a word, and neither did mine hosts. We sat there like delegates to a convention of mutes who were too tired to use their hands. This time the silence seemed even more ominous.

Several minutes must have passed before I began to hear the sounds. That was because I'd been listening for rat scrapings, and not prepared for the noises I actually began to hear.

Mr. and Mrs. Stoddard had their heads cocked to one side, and were staring hard at me, waiting for a sign that I was catching the sounds.

At first the noises seemed faint, blurred perhaps, like an almost inaudible spattering of radio static. Then, as I adjusted my ear to them, I began to get faint squeaks, and small, sharp noises that were like far distant poppings of small firecrackers.

I looked up at the Stoddards.

"Okay," I admitted. "I hear the noises. They seem to be coming from behind the walls, if anywhere."

Stoddard looked smugly triumphant.

"I told you so," he smirked.

"But they aren't rat scrapings," I said. "I know the sounds rats make, and those aren't rat sounds."

Stoddard sat bolt upright. "What?" he demanded indignantly. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me—"

"I do," I cut in. "Ever heard rat noises?"

Stoddard looked at his wife. Both of them frowned. He looked back at me.

"No-o," he admitted slowly. "That is, not until we got these rats. Never had rats before."

"So you jumped to conclusions and thought they were rat noises," I said, "even though you wouldn't recognize a rat noise if you heard one."

Stoddard suddenly stood up. "But

dagnabit, man!" he exploded. "If those aren't rat noises, what are they?"

I shrugged. "I don't know," I admitted. "They sound as if they might be coming through the pipes. Perhaps we ought to take a look around the house, beginning with the basement, eh?"

Stoddard considered this a minute. Then he nodded.

"That seems reasonable enough," he admitted.

I FOLLOWED the amateur designer-owner of this madhouse down into the basement. There we began our prowl for the source of the noise. He snapped on the light switch, and I had a look around. The boiler and everything else in the basement was exactly as I remembered it—in the wrong place.

There was an array of sealed tin cans, each holding about five gallons, banked around the boiler. I tapped on the sides of these and asked Stoddard what they were.

"Naphtha," he explained, "for my wife's cleaning."

"Hell of a place to put them," I commented.

A familiar light came into Stoddard's stubborn eyes.

"That's where I want to put them," he said.

I shrugged. "Okay," I told him. "But don't let the insurance people find out about it."

We poked around the basement some more, and finally, on finding nothing that seemed to indicate a source of the sound, we went back up to the first floor.

Our investigation of pipes and other possible sound carriers on the first floor was also fruitless, although the sounds grew slightly stronger than they'd been in the basement.

I looked at Stoddard, shrugging. "We'd better try the second floor," I said.

I followed him upstairs to the second floor. Aside from the crazy belfry just above the attic, it was the top floor of the wildly constructed domicile.

The sounds were distinctly more audible up there, especially in the center bedroom. We covered the second floor twice and ended back up in that center bedroom again before I realized that we were directly beneath the attic.

I mentioned this to Stoddard.

"We might as well look through the attic, then," Stoddard said.

I led the way this time as we clambered up into the attic.

"Ever looked for your so-called rats up here?" I called over my shoulder.

Stoddard joined me, snapping on a flashlight, spraying the beam around the attic rafters. "No," he said. "Of course not."

I was opening my mouth to answer, when I suddenly became aware that the noises were now definitely louder. Noises faint, but not blurred any longer. Noises which weren't really noises, but were actually voices!

I grabbed Stoddard by the arm.

"Listen!" I ordered.

We stood there silently for perhaps half a minute. Yes, there wasn't any question about it now. I knew that the faint sounds were those of human voices.

"Good heavens!" Stoddard exclaimed.

"Rats, eh?" I said sarcastically.

"But, but—" Stoddard began. He was obviously bewildered.

"There's a sort of central pipe and wiring maze up here," I told him, "due to the plans we were forced to follow in building this house of yours. Those faint voices are carried through the pipes and wires for some reason of sound vibration, and hurled up here.

Just tell me where you keep your radio, and we'll solve your problem."

Stoddard looked at me a minute.

"But we don't own a radio," he said quietly.

I WAS suddenly very much deflated.

"Are you sure?" I demanded.

"Don't be silly," Stoddard told me.

I stood there scratching my head and feeling foolish. Then I got another idea.

"Have you been up in that, ah, ornamental belfry since you moved in?" I asked.

"Of course not," Stoddard said. "It's to look at. Not to peek out of."

"I have a hunch the sounds might be even more audible up there," I said.

"Why?"

I scratched my head. "Just a hunch."

"Well it's a dammed fool one," Stoddard said. He turned around and started out of the attic. I followed behind him.

"You have to admit you haven't rats," I said.

Stoddard muttered something I couldn't catch. When we got down to the first floor again, Mrs. Stoddard was waiting expectantly for our arrival.

"Did you discover where the rats are?" she demanded.

Stoddard shot me a glance. "They aren't rats," he said with some reluctance. "The noises, we'd swear, are faint voices and sounds of human beings moving around. Were you talking to yourself while we were upstairs, Laura?"

Mrs. Stoddard gave her husband a surprised look. "Who was there to talk with, George?" she asked.

I had had about enough of this. I was damned tired of trotting around the weirdly laid out floors of the Stoddard home trying to track down rats which weren't rats but voices.

"If there are inexplicable echoes in this building," I said, "it is due to the construction. And don't forget, you wanted it this way. Now that I have proved to your satisfaction that you don't have rats, I might as well go. Good day."

I got my hat, and neither Stoddard nor his wife had much to say as they saw me to the door. Their accusing attitudes had vanished, however, and they both seemed even a trifle sheepish.

It was two o'clock when I left them. I'd killed better than an hour and a half prowling around the place, and another half hour driving out. I was damned disgusted by the time I got back to my office.

You can imagine my state of mind, consequently, some twenty-five minutes after I'd been back in my office, when I answered the telephone to hear Stoddard's voice coming over it.

"Mr. Kermit," he babbled excitedly, "this is George B. Stoddard again, Mr. Kermit!"

"What've you got now?" I demanded. "And don't tell me termites!"

"Mr. Kermit," Stoddard gasped, "you have to come back right away, Mr. Kermit!"

"I will like hell," I told him flatly, hanging up.

The telephone rang again in another half minute. It was Stoddard again.

"Mr. Kermit, pleeeease listen to me! I beg of you, come out here at once. It's terribly important!"

I didn't say a word this time. I just hung right up.

In another half minute the telephone was jangling again. I was purple when I picked it up this time.

"Listen," I bellowed. "I don't care what noises you're hearing now—"

Stoddard cut in desperately, shouting at the top of his lungs to do so.

"I'm not only hearing the noises, Kermit," he yelled, "I'm *seeing* the people

who cause them!"

THIS caught me off balance.

"Huh?" I gulped.

"The belfry," he yelled, "I went up in the belfry, and you can see the people who's voices we heard!" There was a pause, while he found breath, then he shouted, "You have to come over. You're the only one I can think of to show this to!"

Stoddard was an eccentric, but only so far as his tastes in architecture were concerned. I realized this, as I sat there gaping foolishly at the still vibrating telephone in my hand.

"Okay," I said, for no earthly reason that I could think of, "okay, hang on. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Mrs. Stoddard met me at the door this time. She was worried, almost frightened, and very bewildered.

"George is upstairs, Mr. Kermit. He won't let me come up there. He told me to send you up the minute you arrived. He's up in the attic."

"What on earth," I began.

"I don't know," his wife said. "I was down in the basement drying some clothes, when I heard this terrible yelling from George. Then he was calling you on the telephone. I don't know what it's all about."

I raced up to the attic in nothing flat, almost knocking my teeth out on the bottom step of the attic stairs.

Then I stumbled into the darkness of the attic, and saw Stoddard's flashlight bobbing around in a corner.

"Kermit?"

It was Stoddard's voice.

"Yes," I answered. "What in the hell is up? It had better be goo—."

"Hurry," Stoddard said. "Over here, quickly!"

I stumbled across the board spacings until I was standing beside Stoddard and peering up at what the beam of his flashlight revealed on the ceiling—a ragged, open hole, which he'd made by tearing several coatings of insulation from the spot.

For a minute, I couldn't make out anything in that flash beam glare. Stoddard had hold of my arm, and was saying one word over and over, urgently.

"Look. Look. Look!"

Then my eyes got adjusted to the light change, and I was aware that I was gazing up into the interior of the crazy belfry atop the monstrous house. Gazing up into the interior, while voices, quite loud and clearly distinguishable, were talking in a language which I didn't recognize immediately. As far as my vision was concerned, I might as well have been looking at a sort of grayish vaporish screen of some sort, that was all I saw.

"Shhhh!" Stoddard hissed now. "Don't say a word. Just listen to them!"

I held my breath, although it wasn't necessary. As I said, the voices coming down from that belfry were audible enough to have been a scant ten or twelve feet away. But I held my breath anyway, meanwhile straining my eyes to pierce that gray screen of vapor on which the light was focused.

And then I got it. The voices were talking in German, two of them, both harsh, masculine.

"What in the hell," I began. "Is there a short wave set up there or—"

Stoddard cut me off. "Can't you see it yet?" he hissed.

THE voices went on talking, while I strained my eyes even more in an effort to pierce that gray fog covering the rent in the ceiling. And then I saw. Saw at first, as if through a thin gray screen of gauze.

I was looking up into a room of some sort. A big room. An incredibly big

room. A room so big that two dozen belfry rooms would have fit into it!

And then it got even clearer. There was a desk at the end of the room. A tremendously ornate desk. A desk behind which was sitting a small, gray uniformed, moustached man.

There was another uniformed person of porcine girth standing beside that desk and pointing to a map on the wall in front of him. He was jabbering excitedly to the little man at the desk, and he wore a uniform that was so plushily gaudy it was almost ridiculous.

The two kept chattering back and forth to each other in German, obviously talking about the map at which the fat, plush-clad one was pointing.

I turned incredulously to Stoddard.

"Wh-wh-what in the hell goes?" I demanded.

Stoddard seemed suddenly vastly relieved. "So you see it and hear it, too!" he exclaimed. "Thank God for that! I thought I'd lost my mind!"

I grabbed hard on his arm. "But listen," I began.

"Listen, nothing," he hissed. "We *both* can't be crazy. Those are the voices we kept hearing before. And those two people are the talkers. Those two German (five words censored) louses, Hitler and Goering!"

There, he'd said it. I hadn't dared to. It sounded too mad, too wildly, babblingly insane to utter. But now I looked back through that thin gray cheesecloth of fog, back into the room.

The two occupants couldn't be anyone other than Hitler and Goering. And I was suddenly aware that the map Goering pointed to so frequently was a map of Austria.

"But what," I started again.

Stoddard looked me in the eye. "I can understand a little German," he said. "They're talking about an invasion of Austria, and if you will look hard at the corner of that map, you'll see a date marked—1938!"

I did look hard, and of course I saw that date. I turned back to Stoddard.

"We're both crazy," I said a little wildly, "we're both stark, raving nuts. Let's get out of here."

"We are looking back almost five years into the past," Stoddard hissed. "We are looking back five years into Germany, into a room in which Hitler and Goering are talking over an approaching invasion of a country called Austria. I might have believed I was crazy when I first found this alone, but not now!"

Maybe we were both crazy. Maybe he was wrong. But then and there I believed him, and I knew that somehow, in some wild, impossible fashion, that belfry on Stoddard's asinine house had become a door leading through space and time, back five years into Germany, into the same room where Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering planned the conquest of Austria!

Stoddard was taking something out of his pocket.

"Now that you're here I can try it," he said. "I didn't dare do so before, since I felt I couldn't trust my own mind alone in the thing."

I looked at what he held in his hands. A stone, tied to a long piece of string.

"What's that for?" I demanded.

"I want to see if that veil, that gray fog door, can be penetrated," he hissed.

STODDARD was swinging the stone on a string in a sharp arc now. And suddenly he released it, sending it sailing through the grayish aperture in the ceiling, straight into the belfry, or rather, the big room.

I saw and heard the stone on the string hit the marble floor of that room. Then, just as sharply, Stoddard jerked it back, yanking it into the attic again.

The result in the room beyond the fog sheet was instantaneous. Goering wheeled from the map on the wall, glaring wildly around the room. A pistol was in his hand.

Hitler had half risen behind that ornate desk, and was searching the vast, otherwise unoccupied room wildly with his eyes.

Of course neither saw anything. Stoddard, breathing excitedly at my side, had pulled the stone back into our section of time and space. But his eyes were gleaming.

"It can be done," he whispered fiercely. "It can be crossed!"

"But what on—" I started. He cut me off with a wave of his hand, pointing back to the gray screen covering the hole in the ceiling.

Goering had put the pistol back in the holster at his side, and was grinning sheepishly at der Fuehrer, who was resuming his seat behind the desk in confused and angry embarrassment.

The voices picked up again.

"They're saying how silly, to be startled by a sound," Stoddard hissed in my ear.

Then he grabbed my arm. "But come, we can't wait any longer. Something has to be done immediately."

He was pulling me away from the rent in the ceiling, away from the door that had joined our time and space to the time and space of a world and scene five years ago.

As we emerged from the attic and started blinkingly down the steps, Stoddard almost ran ahead of me.

"We must hurry," he said again and again.

"To where?" I demanded bewilderedly. "Hadn't we better do something about th—"

"Exactly," Stoddard panted. "We're really going to do something about that phenomenon in the belfry. We're going to the first place in two where we can buy two rifles, quick!"

"Rifles?" I gasped, still not getting it.

"For that little moustached swine up there," Stoddard said, pointing toward the attic. "If a stone can cross that gray barrier, so can bullets. We are both going to draw bead on Adolf Hitler in the year of 1938, and thus avert this hell he's spread since then. With two of us firing, we can't miss."

And then, of course, I got it. It was incredible, impossible. But that gray screen covering the rent in the attic ceiling upstairs wasn't impossible. I'd seen it. Neither was the room behind it, the room where the belfry was supposed to be, but where Adolf Hitler's inner sanctum was instead. I'd seen that, too. So was it impossible that we'd be able to eliminate the chief cause of the world's trouble by shooting accurately back across time and space?

At that moment I didn't think so!

Our mad clattering dash down the attic steps, and then down to the first floor brought Mrs. Stoddard up from the basement. She looked frightenedly from her husband to me, then back to him again.

"What's wrong?" she quavered.

"Nothing," Stoddard said, pushing her gently but quickly aside as we dashed for the door.

"But, George!" Mrs. Stoddard shrilled behind us. We heard her footsteps hurrying toward the door, even as we were out of it.

"My car," I yelled. "It's right in front. I know the closest place where we can get the guns!"

STODDARD and I piled into the car like a pair of high school kids when the last bell rings. Then I was gunning the motor, while out of the corner of my eye I could see Stoddard's wife running down the front steps shouting

shrilly after us.

We jumped from the curb like a plane from a catapult, doing fifty by my quick shift to second gear. Then we were tearing the quiet streets of Mayfair's second subdivision apart with the noise of a blasting horn and a snarling motor.

It was ten minutes later when I screeched to a stop in front of the sports and gun store I'd remembered existed in Mayfair's first subdivision. The clerk was amazed at the wild speed with which we raced in, grabbed the guns, threw the money on the counter, and dashed out.

We must have looked like something out of a gangster movie as we raced back to Stoddard's place.

I was doing the driving, and Stoddard had clambered in beside me, both rifles, and several cartridge packages in his hands. He was rocking back and forth in mad impatience, as if by rocking he could increase our speed. The expression on his face was positively bloodthirsty.

And then we heard the sirens behind us. Shrill, coming up like comet wails in spite of our own speed.

"Oh, God!" Stoddard groaned. "Police!"

I squinted up into my rear vision mirror. We were less than two blocks from the Stoddard house, now, and the thought of being overhauled by police at the juncture was sickening, unbearable even to contemplate.

And then I saw the reason for the sirens. Saw them in the rear vision mirror. Two fire engines, one a hook and ladder outfit, the other a hose truck!

"It's all right," I yelped. "It's only two fire trucks!"

"Thank God!" Stoddard gasped.

We were a block from his place now, with only one corner left to turn before we'd see the mad architectural monstrosity he called him home; before we'd see the crazy belfry which held the salvation of the world in its screwballish, queer-angled lines.

And then the fire trucks and the sirens were nearer and louder, less than a block behind us. At that instant we turned the corner and came into full view of the Stoddard place.

It was a mass of flames, utterly, roaringly ablaze!

I almost drove us off the street and into a tree. And by the time I'd gotten a grip on myself, we were just a few houses away from the blazing inferno of Stoddard's crazy quilt dwelling.

I stopped by the curb, and clambered out of the car onto knees which would scarcely support me. My stomach was turning over and over in an apparently endless series of nauseating somersaults.

Stoddard, white-faced, frozen, stood there beside me, clutching the guns and the cartridge boxes foolishly in his hands.

Then someone was running up to us. Running and crying sobbingly, breathlessly. It was Stoddard's wife.

The fire trucks screeched to a stop before the blazing building at that instant, and her first words were drowned in the noise they made.

". . . just drying out some clothes, George," she sobbed. "Just drying them out and turned on the furnace to help dry them. You left like that, and I got frightened. I ran to a neighbor's. The explosion and fire started not five minutes later."

Sickly, I thought of the naphtha Stoddard had piled near his boiler. I didn't say anything, though, for I knew he was thinking of it also.

He dropped the guns and cartridge boxes, and in a tight, strained voice, while putting his arms comfortingly

around his wife, said: "That's all right, Laura. It wasn't your fault. We'll have another house like this. So help me God, *just like this!*"

IT HAS been six months now since Stoddard's architectural eyesight burned to the ground. He started rebuilding immediately after that. I turned over all the drafts my company made from his first crude "plans," and he handed them to the supervisor of the construction company he bought out. You see, he took every dime he owned, sold out his insurance business, and has gone into the building game in dead earnest.

He explained it to me this way.

"I couldn't go on having house after house built and torn down on the same spot, Kermit. It would break me in no time. This way, with my own company to construct the house every time, I'll save about half each time."

"Then you're going to build precisely the same house?" I demanded.

His jaw went hard, and he peered from behind his spectacles with the intense glare of a fanatic. For once he didn't look like Mr. Suburbanite.

"You know damned well I am," he said. "And until it is *precisely* the same as the first, I'll keep tearing 'em down and putting 'em up again. I don't care if I have to build a thousand to do it, right on this spot!"

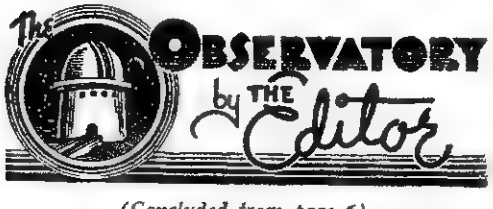
Of course I knew what he meant by precisely the same. And I wondered what on earth the odds were he was bucking. Through chance and a mad combination of angles, that time and space door had appeared the first time. But it might have been hanging on the tinest atom of a fractional difference.

Stoddard has already finished his second house, and although it *looks* exactly like the monstrosity I first built for him, it can't be *precisely* like it. For he didn't get the gray shrouded door when he poked a hole in the attic ceiling and looked up into the second crazy belfry. All he saw was the belfry.

Tomorrow he starts tearing down to build another, and pretty soon people are going to be certain he's crazy.

As a matter of fact, they'll soon be pretty sure I'm loony also. For of course I can't help going over there now and then to sort of lend a hand. . . .

The End



(Concluded from page 6)

FOR our readers who want reproductions on fine stock of our illustrations, we are trying a test "illustration" this month. To discover whether or not it will be feasible, we are designating the illustration for "Queen of the Flaming Diamond," by Virgil Finlay, as this month's choice. Those of you who wish prints of this fine illustration, on enameled stock suitable for framing, we offer them for the small sum of 15c to cover the cost of reproduction, packaging, and mailing. Get your order in right now, because only a limited number of reproductions will be available.

YOUR editor drives a car, as do many Americans, and naturally, the war has effected us as well as everyone else. But driving when we do, we are angered by the motorists who refuse to obey the 35-mile speed law. So we decided to do something about it—and what we did proved so successful that we recommend that all you who drive cars do the same thing. When you are passed up by one of these unpatriotic, or at least unthinking drivers, just press down on your horn button three short and one long—and watch 'em tramp down on the brakes with a red face! Here's the way for us to regulate that wasteful speeding without the necessity of a flock of policemen. V for victory! Give it to 'em, right on the horn!

WE DON'T know how many of you readers also read our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*, but any of you who have, certainly remember a story called "The Whispering Gorilla," by Don Wilcox. Well, the February issue of *Fantastic Adventures* has the long awaited sequel

to the story, "The Whispering Gorilla Returns," but this time authored by David V. Reed, with the kind permission of the character's owner, Don Wilcox. Thanks Don, and congratulations Reed, for something really swell. Robert Gibson Jones painted the cover and it's grand!

OUR back cover this month features the first of the "water-borne" vessels of other worlds, slightly ahead of schedule, since we still have a few airships of other worlds to come. But artist James B. Settles was so enthusiastic about it that he brought it in ahead of time, and we thought it was so good we decided to treat you to a preview of what's in store for you. Settles is a recognized master of marine paintings, and personally, we like him better than Sessions.

THE matter of reprints has been receiving a lot of our attention, and many letters from you have helped us out. As a result, next issue we begin the first of a two-part serial, giving you the famed novel by Stanley G. Weinbaum, "The New Adam." This novel was published in book form but never in magazine form. We think you'll like it. The first instalment is illustrated by Virgil Finlay in smashing style.

WE HAVE some sweeping surprises in store for you in this matter of reprints, and you can know one thing now, we intend to give you some of the finest literature of an amazing and fantastic nature ever written. We won't promise to give you a reprint every month, but we will come through with the world's best as fast as we can secure it.

WILLIAM B. ZIFF, who is the publisher of AMAZING STORIES, which should be ace-high recommendation, has a best seller on the bookstands you ought to read. It's called "The Coming Battle of Germany," and we think it's the finest piece of factual science fiction (fiction in the sense that it deals with the future) that we've read in a long time. Mr. Ziff knows what he's talking about when it comes to war in the air, and we aren't saying that because he's our boss. This department never hands you anything but the straight dope, and readers, this is straight. Get that book and read it!

IF YOU'RE looking for A. R. Steber's recently forecast story in this issue, blame its absence on Robert Moore Williams for writing so many fine words into his novel around the cover story. But it'll be along one of these months! It can't get shoved around much longer!

EVER see an editor in a story? Well, get the January issue of *Fantastic Adventures* on sale the 20th of November, and read Clyde Woodruff's "The Man With Five Lives." Besides, it's a sockdologer of a story, one of these things that comes along once in a blue moon.

IF YOU haven't gotten a copy of our new companion magazine, *Mammoth Detective*, which is in its third giant issue, you'd better get it right now! If you don't, you won't be able to. Readers tell us we've got something there. Why not see what your favorite authors can do when they turn to detective story writing?

DWIGHT V. SWAIN recently reported to his draft board—and we haven't heard from him since! Which indicates only one thing; we're going to have an awful hole on the contents page.

WE'VE had stories in this magazine about that extinct bird, the Dodo. Anything extinct has a certain fascination to us. But right now, we want to go on record as saying we'd like to run stories, after this war, on another extinct bird—the isolationist! We ran up against a group of those birds up in Milwaukee the other day, and we came away boiling. As a result, we're going to have a story prepared for AMAZING STORIES which will paint a *true* science fiction picture of the future if the Axis should win. We've pulled our necks in with isolationism in the past, with the result that now we've got 'em stuck out!

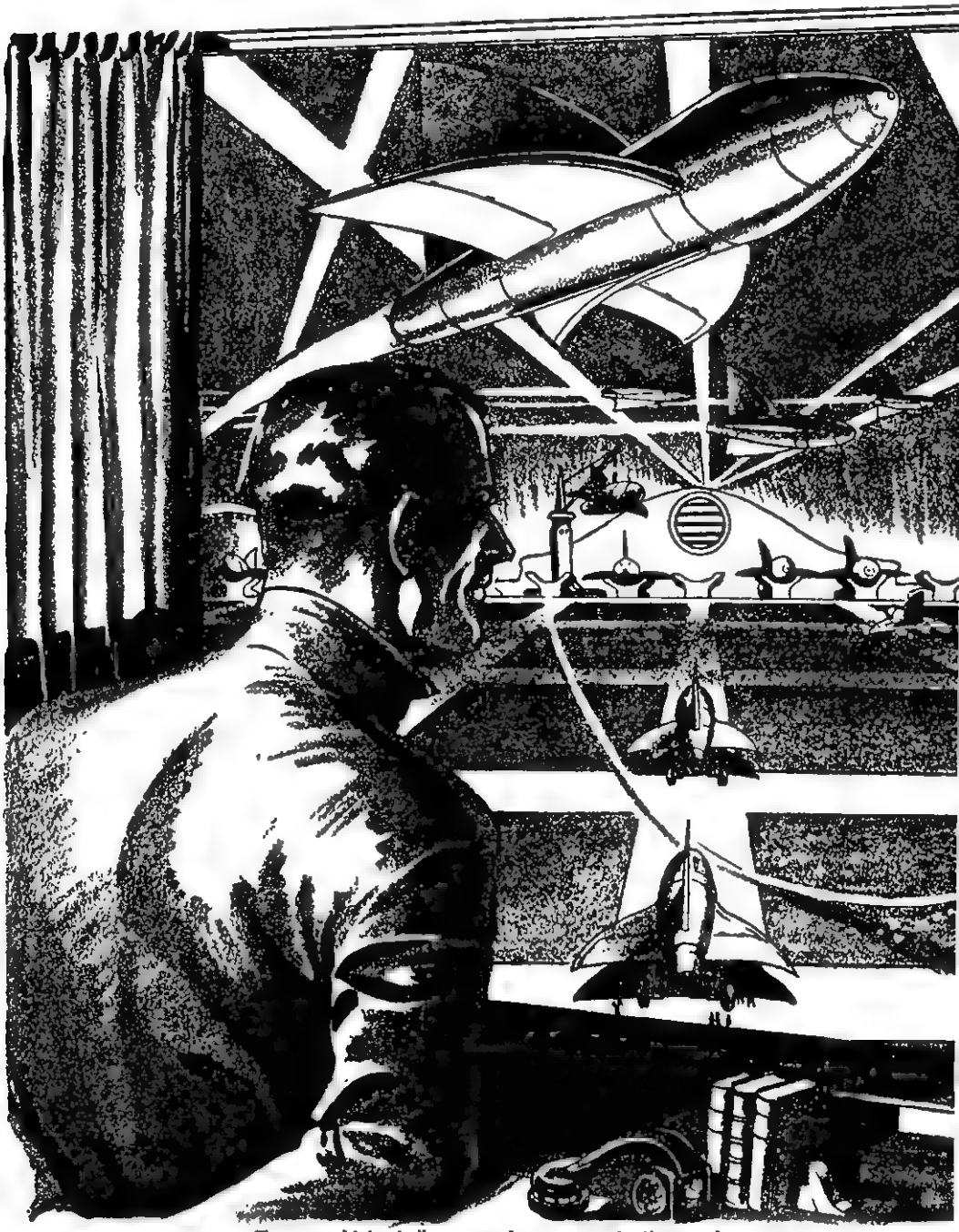
NEXT month Leroy Yerxa gives us a sequel to "Death Rides At Night," featuring those super trucks of his—and featuring a doggone good yarn, by golly, much as we hate to praise a new writer. You'll like "Phantom Transport"! We expect Mr. Yerxa to turn out some pretty nice stuff from now on. Give him a hand on this one, readers, he deserves it.

Which brings us to the end of our chatter for this month. See you subsequently. *Rap*

"But, sir, the natives gave her to me as a gift. I didn't dare refuse!"

LARSON'S

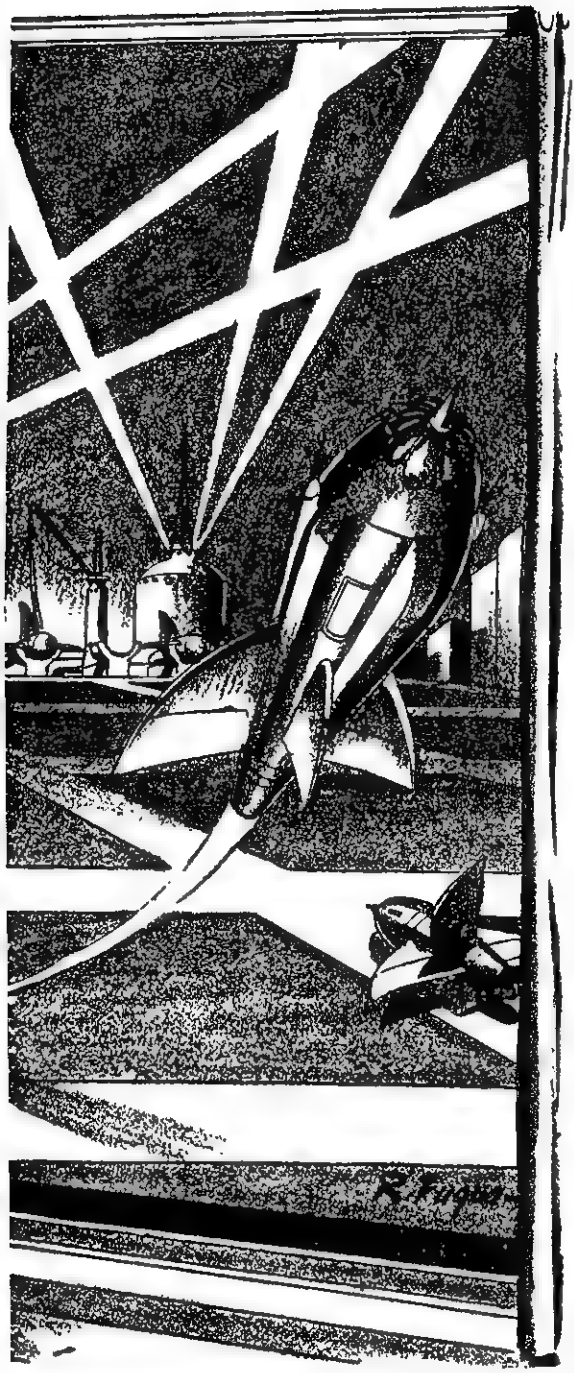
Larson couldn't possibly have known what was going on in the engine room, yet he acted . . .



There would be hell to pay; Larson was stunting again

LUCK

by GERALD VANCE



"WE MOOR in ten minutes," I said.

We were flying at reduced speed because of the heavy fog we had run into at the outer fringe of Earth's atmosphere. But I knew we were within forty or fifty miles of the Trans-Space base. I had counted the miles on this particular trip because of the load of radium we were carrying from the Venusian mines. I wouldn't draw a completely relieved breath until we were down and the stuff was in the hands of the commerce agents.

I eased my position slightly to relieve the pressure on my broken flipper and grinned at the pilot, Lucky Larson, the screwiest, most unpredictable void trotter who had ever flown for dear old Trans-Space.

"You've been too good to be true this trip," I said, "and it's a good thing. The chief told me that if you so much as *thought* about clowning around or stunting he was going to clip your wings for good."

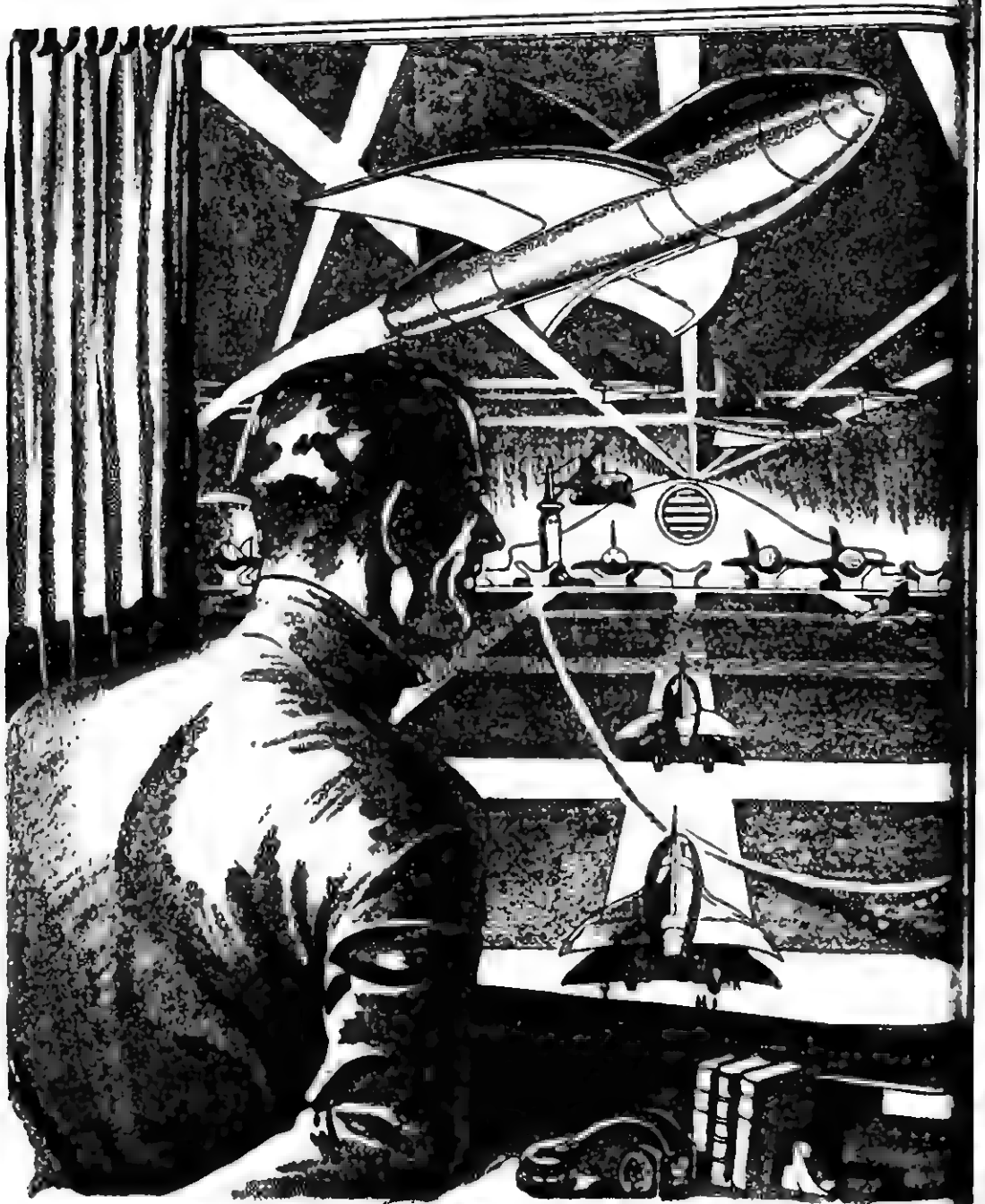
Lucky grinned, an impish, devil-may-care grin that lightened up his freckled face and bunched the tiny wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Then with characteristic abruptness he scowled.

"That grandmother," he said disgustedly. "Who does he think I am, anyway? Some crazy irresponsible madman who hasn't got enough brains to stay on a space beam?"

"That's just what he does think," I grinned, "and you've given him plenty of reason to think it. You can't bring your crate in to the base without stunting around and showing off and risking your damn neck. That's why he sent

LARSON'S LUCK

Larson couldn't possibly have known what was going on in the engine room, yet he acted . . .



There would be hell to pay; Larson was stunting again

me along with you this trip. Just to see that you act like a pilot—instead of circus acrobat."

"A lot of good you'd do," Lucky mumbled. "You got a broken arm. The only reason he sent you is because he didn't want to pay you while you was in the hospital so he cooks up this trip to get his money out of you. And say," he turned to me belligerently, "when did I ever crack up a ship? When did I ever even dent one of the babies?"

"You haven't," I was forced to admit, "but that's just because of that screwy luck of yours. But it won't last forever and one of these days it's going to run out just when you need it. So just remember—no stunting this trip or you'll be out of the strata for the rest of your natural life."

"Aw, that's the trouble with this racket," Lucky grumbled, "a guy can't have no fun no more. Back when I was with the Space circus ."

"Okay, okay," I cut in, "I've heard that before. Just fly your ship, now, and forget about the deep dark plot of the company to take all the joy out of your life. I'm going to take a look-see at the atomic floats and get the passengers bundled together."

I stood up and crawled over him and opened the door leading to the body of the ship. I could still hear him grumbling as I slid the light chromealloy door shut. I chuckled to myself and headed up the aisle to the baggage compartments. Lucky Larson was a legend as space pilots go. An unpredictable, erratic screwball but one of the finest rocket riders who ever flashed through the void.

Company regulations and interplanetary commissions were the bane of his existence. He made his own rules and regulations and got by with it. That is he *had* gotten by with it. Now they were cracking down on him. He had been grounded twice and the chief had threatened to set him down for life if any more infractions were charged to him. I shook my head gloomily. He was a great guy, the last of a great and gallant army of space adventures, but he was on the way out. The rules were necessary, vital to safe space travel and the Lucky Larsons would have to live up to them, or else.

MY MIND was a long way away from the cabin of the space ship and maybe that's why I got what I did. I didn't see it coming. One minute I was walking through the aisle, thinking about Lucky Larson and the next second something slammed into the back of my head knocking me to my knees.

Through a haze of red and white lights I heard a voice bark, "Toss him into a chair and grab that good arm of his."

I wasn't out. Just damn sick. Something like a cold hand seemed to have closed over my stomach and for an awful moment I gagged and tried to retch. But the moment passed and I forced open my eyes and focused them on two tough looking, hard-eyed gents who stood in front of me. Another unpleasant looking little man knelt along side of me, twisting my good arm behind my back.

"Okay," I gritted, "what's the gag?"

The tallest of the three, evidently their leader, smiled at me. "It's no gag," he murmured calmly, "we happen to need the radium you're carrying. We're going to take it. Any objections?"

"You'll never get away with this," I snapped, "your names and descriptions are registered with the passenger office. You'll be tracked down in twenty-four hours."

I was bluffing, of course, and I knew from their contemptuous smiles that

they knew it, too. They probably had given fictitious names, and the descriptive information which the bureau required consisted of a few generalities, such as height, weight and the like. I cursed myself for a stupid, careless fool. The three men had been the only passengers from Venus and they had kept to themselves the entire trip. Once or twice I had wondered at their reticence and quietness but I had not been suspicious enough to make a check-up.

One of the men laughed shortly. "Let us worry about that. We've covered every angle that could possibly come up. With the help of your friend up front, this ship will be flown to a certain deserted asteroid where a few friends of *ours* are to meet us with another ship. How you come out afterward will depend on how you co-operate now. Clear enough?"

It was clear enough all right. Lucky and I wouldn't last long after we served our purpose.

The tall man turned from me and nodded significantly to the man standing next to him and then pointed to the closed door to the pilot's chambers.

"Take care of the pilot," he murmured, "and tell him if he isn't obliging we'll take the cast off his friend's arm and—" he smiled at me, "massage it a bit."

I felt a cold sweat break out on my forehead.

The thug grinned wolfishly at me and then winked at his leader. "I'll tell him, boss." He dug his hand into his pocket and drew out a stubby atomic pistol. "If he won't listen to me maybe this'll persuade him."

Still grinning he turned and headed up the aisle, the gun clenched in his huge fist.

I GLANCED at the tall figure standing in front of me and saw that he was watching the retreating figure of his henchman with a saturnine smile on his face. I thought swiftly. If I could yell a warning to Lucky, he could bolt the door of the pilot's chamber and then set the ship down at the Trans-Space base. It was the only way to save Lucky and the radium. I wasn't very optimistic about my own chances. I knew they were zero.

I opened my mouth, took a deep breath and then, before I could scream the words that would warn Lucky, it happened. The ship shuddered for an instant and then zoomed upward, the smooth hum of the rocket motors crescendoing to a roaring song of power and speed.

The sudden jolting acceleration hurled me to the tail of the ship and I saw, like an image in a kaleidoscope, the tangled threshing figures of the space bandits as they were tossed to the floor, a dazedly struggling mass of arms and legs.

The ship was lying over on its back in a few seconds, and before I could catch a breath it suddenly whipped over and blasted toward Earth in a screeching, hissing power-dive.

It was terrific punishment even for this type of space crate but it was worse for human beings. The three bandits were clutching at their stomachs as if they were afraid of losing them. Their faces were mottled and blotchy and their eyes were rolling beseechingly.

I didn't mind the erratic convolutions the ship was making but my arm was burning as if it were on fire. Numbing waves of pain were coursing up and down my entire body.

I tried to crawl to my knees but the floor rolled under me as the ship whipped over in a twisting spiral and I crashed forward on my face. Then everything dissolved into inky blackness . . .

WHEN I came to, I heard a great commotion, then a sudden shot and then a babble of voices booming around me. I remember thinking fleetingly of crooks, Lucky Larson and a mountain of radium and then—because nothing made sense—I passed out again.

THE next time I opened my eyes I found myself stretched out on a cot in the chief's office. I turned my head slightly and saw Lucky Larson, the chief and a half dozen other guys staring down at me.

"It's not very original," I said, "but where the hell am I?" That was silly of me because I knew where I was, so I said: "Never mind that but please tell me what the hell happened?"

The chief laughed and Lucky Larson laughed and then they slapped each other on the back. "Don't worry about a thing," the chief said, "those crooks are under lock and key and there's not a thing to worry about."

"But how—I mean what . . . ?" My voice trailed off. Nothing made sense.

"Well," the chief broke in, "Lucky here really deserves the credit for catching them. And I'm not forgetting your good work either. Both of you will receive more tangible evidence of my appreciation. But Lucky really did the brainwork."

"Awww," Lucky mumbled, "it wasn't much. Just a little common sense and, uh, a little luck."

"It was damn fast thinking," the chief cut in belligerently, "you knew your stunting over the base would drive me crazy. You knew I'd get so mad I'd call out the base police and have you thrown in when you moored. And when you did moor and the crooks toppled out we were right on hand to receive them. They were so weak from the shaking up you gave them that they didn't have a chance."

Lucky rolled innocent eyes to the ceiling. "Sometimes," he remarked piously, "stunting has its uses."

"Congratulations," I said weakly. "You certainly used your head. Caught the chief's attention with your stunting and almost knocked the crooks out with it too. That's killing two birds with one stone, all right." Then another thought occurred to me.

"How did you know I was in trouble?" I asked curiously. "How did you know we had those crooks on board?"

"Why — why," Lucky sputtered, "that was simple. I just happened to look behind me and I saw those boys piling into you. So I did a little fast thinking and then I whipped the ship into a few maneuvers and, like the chief says, they caught his eye all right."

The chief was beaming fondly and I turned my head to hide the smile on my lips. "So you just looked behind you," I muttered. "Well, Lucky, you certainly are—and were."

He grinned down at me and winked. "You said it, kid."

I wanted to ask him a question then, but I decided to wait until we were alone. I closed my eyes and smiled again, thinking of his expression when I would ask him how he had been able to look behind him and see me struggling with those crooks, *when the door of the pilot's chamber was closed all the time. . . .*

THE END

FOR THE BEST IN FANTASY FICTION—FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

PLASTIC AGE

THE Closure and Plastics Division of the Owens-Illinois Glass Company recently announced another case where plastics are being substituted for metals. Items which were available only in aluminum are now being manufactured of plastic materials by this organization.

Officials of the company report that future developments in this field are limited only by the imagination of designers and the ability of manufacturers to pace the demand for new molds.

The most recent products of Owens-Illinois are a polystyrene funnel, a standardized teaspoon for medicinal dosages also made of polystyrene, a plastic measuring spoon for coffee, and a two-color inhaler of opaque plastic which already is in use in the field of proprietary drugs.

* * *

PREDICTING MULTIPLE BIRTHS

DR. ARTHUR J. GEIGLER and his associates at the Yale University School of Medicine have perfected a method of making electric recordings of the heart beats of a baby before it is born. By this new method it is possible for the doctor to tell the expectant mother whether she will bear twins or not, much sooner than any other method thus far used.

This new technique also makes it possible for the doctor to determine whether his patient is pregnant or has a tumor. This method is much more accurate and takes less time than the rabbit, mouse, or similar biological tests for pregnancy. It is quite simple in operation. Disk electrodes are placed on the patient's abdomen and if the woman is pregnant the device will pick up the electric current that is produced by the heart beats of the baby.

* * *

A ROBOT DRAFTSMAN

FOR the past year, a robot draftsman in the "body" of the largest camera in the world has been working as a draftsman at the Glenn L. Martin airplane plant and has done the work of over 300 human technicians.

This "experiment" has proved so successful that another robot has been added to the plant's personnel to double the output of work.

The camera, which takes up two rooms, magnifies the original drawing to working size and photographs it right on to the metal, cloth, or any other material that is used. A worker can then cut out the part which does away with the labor and time required to trace the pattern by hand. If a test model is desired, the robot can "shrink" the drawing to any size desired. This is especially helpful to diecasters who formerly had to use shrink scales in their work. If necessary, the drawing can be expanded the exact amount to allow for shrinkage in metals when cooled. Since aluminum alloys do not shrink or swell like paper, a photograph on them is the actual base of jigs and fixtures on which airplane parts are assembled.

The body of the camera is located in one room while the bellows and lens go into the next room where the drawings are mounted and photographed. After the photograph is taken, the image of the negative is "shot" from the first room into the second where the material is placed in position to receive the drawing. Thus, even robots are being developed to aid America in the war effort.

* * *

ELECTRON MICROSCOPE

AN INSTRUMENT capable of magnifying an object 100,000 times, the first American commercially built electron microscope, is now in use in Stamford, Connecticut.

This new super-microscope, constructed by the RCA Research Laboratories in Camden, New Jersey, takes pictures with electrons instead of light waves. It is in use in the laboratories of the American Cyanamid Company

Already used in studying pigments for the paper industry, the microscope has shown that the very minute particles have the same crystalline structure as the larger ones observed with old type microscopes, disproving a widely held theory.

* * *

EXPENSIVE HENS

IN TIMES of war and stress eggs are often such an expense and luxury because a hen requires three times as much food as a cow to produce the same amount of food.

* * *

NYLON—BUT NOT FOR STOCKINGS

IF YOU think that nylon is only used to make pretty underthings and stockings for milady, you are very wrong. Nylon has many patented uses, most of which are helping the war effort—this being the major reason why it is so scarce today in the form of stockings.

One of the latest uses to be discovered for nylon is as a bearing in machinery. If it can prove that it "can take it," it will find wide acceptance since it can get along without any oil or water lubrication.

WARRIOR of the DAWN

by HOWARD BROWNE

No man ever faced a greater task than Tharn in the city of Sephar; every man was his enemy, every beast against him

Concluding Instalment

Synopsis of Part One

UPON his return from a hunting trip, THARN, Cro-Magnard warrior, and son of a tribal chief, learns a rival band has attacked the caves of his people and seriously wounded his father. Young Tharn, sworn to vengeance, trails the marauders to their own caves. There he rescues DYLARA, daughter of the enemy chief, from the attack of a leopard. Smitten by the girl's loveliness, he abducts her, only to be ambushed by a party of strange men who strike down Tharn and make off with the girl. Tharn, recovering from his wounds, trails the strangers to a great city beyond an immense circular stone wall.

Meanwhile, Dylara has been brought before URIM, ruler of SEPHAR, the stone city. He puts her in the care of NADA, a Cro-Magnard slave woman, that she may learn the customs and habits of the Sepharians, whose mode of living is far superior to the cave-dwelling Cro-Magnards.

A visitor to Sephar, JOTAN, who, with his companions, TAMAR and JAVAN, has only recently arrived from AMMAD, the mother country—sees Dylara and, over Tamar's protests, falls in love with her. ALURNA, daughter of Urim, has decided to annex Jotan for herself. Upon learning of the visitor's infatuation for the cave girl, she plots to have her assassinated.

Tharn, entering the city under cover of night, is captured and thrown into a cell with other prisoners, some of them members of his own race. Here he makes a friend in KATON, noble of HUXLA, a city of far-off Ammad; and an enemy in VULCAR, captain of the palace guard.

Brought before Urim, the next day, Tharn is sentenced to the Games—a series of combats between men and between men and beasts, which takes place each year as a tribute to the Sepharian God. PRYAK, high priest of the Sepharian religion, is a bitter enemy of Urim, who has clashed with the high priest on several occasions.

Alurna, enraged by Jotan's intention to secure Dylara for himself, engages MELTOR, an unprincipled Sepharian, to kidnap the cave girl, take her into the jungle and slay her. Meltor succeeds in removing Dylara from the city and takes her to an abandoned dwelling deep in the jungle.

Meanwhile, Jotan and his friends discover Dylara's abduction and the location of the spot Meltor has taken her. They at once set out to rescue her, if possible. Alurna, learning of this, also sets out, with a group of palace guards, with the intention of getting to Meltor and Dylara in

Mog snatched Aluna into his arms and made off through the forest

advance of Jotan.

Jotan and his men arrive at the abandoned dwelling ahead of Alurna. They burst into the room, only to find Meltor dead on the floor. Dylara is gone.

Now go on with the story.

* * *

CHAPTER X

The Hairy Men

FOR several moons now, Urb, the Neanderthal, and his tribe had found it increasingly difficult to locate game in the neighborhood of the family caves. The reason could be any one of several: a nearby water-hole dried up until the rainy season came again; a family of lions holed up close by; an absence of adequate pasturage.

Urb sat crouched near the foot of a lofty escarpment that contained the tribal caves. His deep-sunk button eyes, beneath beetling brows, indifferently watched the young ones of the tribe playing about the clearing between jungle and cliff. Below a flattened, shapeless wedge of nose, his thick pendulous lips worked in and out in worried and laborious thought. As leader of his tribe, Urb was concerned about the lack of game.

It had been comparatively cool here in the shadows of the scarp during most of the morning; but with noon growing near, the sun's direct rays began to penetrate the thick growth of black coarse hair with which Urb's gross body was almost entirely covered.

And so he rose at last and, like the great bull ape he so closely resembled, clambered awkwardly but quickly to one of the caves.

Just inside the entrance he squatted his two hundred and fifty pounds on a boulder and fell to watching Gorb, his eldest son, put final touches to a flint spear head. After heating the bit of rock in a small fire for several minutes, Gorb would withdraw it, hastily touch a spot near the edge with a drop of water which caused a tiny bit of the flint to scale away, then repeat the entire process. It was a long and tedious task; but Gorb had that untiring patience given to those for whom time has no meaning. Eventually, his perseverance would reward him with a fine weapon.

Urb was secretly proud of his son. Even as a boy, Gorb had shown no interest in hunting or in war. Beneath his sharply receding forehead was the brain and soul of a true artist—a soul that found its expression by the creation of implements of the chase and of battle. No other member of Urb's tribe could even approach the artistry Gorb put into his work; no other could fashion a spear so true in balance; none could produce a flint knife so keen-edged and well-formed.

The half-finished spear head reminded Urb of his own immediate problem.

"Gorb," he said, "only two kills have our men made in the past five suns, although all have gone forth each day to hunt. It is not because Narjok or Bana or Muta run away before we can kill them. We cannot find them at all; only twice in those five suns have we come upon the spoor of any one of them."

Gorb paused at his work and drew a hairy forearm across his sweaty face. "Last night," he said, "long after Dyta had found his lair, I heard Sadu roaring and growling among the trees. It was the noise of a hungry Sadu; he, too, was angry because there is no meat."

Urb grunted. Since the day before, he had been turning an idea over in his slow-moving mind, and now he sought to put it into words.

"Tomorrow," he said, "when Dyta

first awakens, some of us will look for caves far from here. I will go; Boz and Kor and Tolb and you, Gorb, will go with me. There are many hills; there will be many caves in them, and much meat in grasslands nearby. When we find a good place we will come back for the others of our tribe."

"Good!" approved Gorb, turning back to his labors. "It has been many suns since I have eaten all the meat I can hold. I will go with you, Urb."

EARLY the next morning a little band of Neanderthal men descended the escarpment and set out toward the rising sun. They were six; besides those named by Urb, Mog, the sullen, had been taken. All were armed with huge flint-studded hard-wood clubs, so heavy that only an arm of great strength might wield one; rude knives of flint and short-shafted spears completed their armament.

They moved along with the curious shuffling gait peculiar to their kind alone. Their passage seemed to diffuse an atmosphere of terror and dread, striking dumb the countless denizens of the teeming jungle. Urb was in the lead, his small black eyes darting about for the first sign of danger, ears and nose alert lest Sadu or Jalok or Tarlok find him and his fellows unprepared. But if any of the more formidable beasts were near, they remained concealed. Only Pandor, the elephant, neglected to give the Hairy Men a wide berth when several were together — Pandor, who feared no creature that walked or flew or wriggled.

The shaggy-coated males moved steadily ahead, their objective a group of low mountains far to the east, the upper portions of which were clearly discernible on the few occasions the band crossed a clearing of any consequence.

At noon they halted on the reed-covered banks of a shallow river; and while Urb and Tolb hunted game, the others rested beneath the broad boughs of a jungle patriarch.

Soon the two hunters returned, bearing between them the still warm carcass of Muta, the wild boar. Each of the six hacked off a juicy portion and devoured it raw, blood matting the hair of face and chest.

After drinking at the river's brink, the brute-men stretched out beneath the trees, covered their faces with huge fronds of a palm tree and slept until mid-afternoon. Urb roused them, then, and once more the savage band took up their march.

Darkness was near when the six passed through a fringe of jungle and paused at the foot of a lofty cliff. Urb, deciding too little daylight remained for them to attempt scaling the vertical slope, ordered the Neanderthals back into the forest.

Here they supped on flesh of the boar killed earlier in the day, then sought couches among the tree branches. During daylight it was all very well to sleep in comfort on the jungle floor; but during the night it was safer aloft. The great cats usually laid up during the day, digesting the previous night's kill; but once Uda, the moon, made an appearance, the forest abounded with hungry carnivora.

WITH the first rays of the morning sun the six men began the perilous climb. Slow-moving and awkward, they made hard going of the ascent, but their tremendous strength aided them where lesser muscles would have failed altogether, and finally the crest was reached.

Here they stood at the edge of a great tableland, clothed with primeval forest from which, in the distance,

loomed four low mountain peaks. Game seemed plentiful; as they watched, a herd of antelope grazing to their left caught their scent and bounded away across a narrow ribbon of grassland which lay between the forest and the plateau's edge. A band of monkeys chattered and scolded at them from the safety of middle terraces, while a cloud of raucous-voiced birds rose with a whirring beat of wings and flew deeper inland.

Not far to their right was the entrance to a narrow deep-worn game trail leading into tangled mazes of brush, creeper, vine and trees. It was toward this trail that Urb turned his footsteps, motioning for his companions to follow.

"Here is food enough," he exulted. "If we can find caves in those hills, we will go back to fetch the rest of our people."

In silence the six frightful, man-like creatures faded into the black shadows of the overhanging forest, their goal the towering heights at the far end of this plateau.

And directly between them and their objective lay Sephar, mysterious city of an unknown race.

* * *

DYLARA lay face down on a broad branch, her head pillowed on a heap of moss, biting her lips to keep back tears of bitter anguish. The swollen ankle throbbed steadily, its pain almost unbearable.

And she had been so close to freedom! From her place high in the tree she could see the stone walls of Rydob's dwelling, evil and grim in the sun. Behind those walls lay the dead body of Meltor, slain by his own knife.

She felt no regret for having killed him. It had been his life—or hers. When he had lunged across the table in an attempt to stab her, she, acting by instinct rather than thought, had thrust her weight against the table. Meltor, off balance, went over backwards, his head striking hard against the floor. Before he could regain his wits Dylara had torn the knife from his hand. He cried out once in mortal fear as the blade swung high, flung up a futile hand to ward off the blow, and died as polished flint pierced his heart.

No—she felt no regret for having killed him. What she did regret was the mad impulse that had sent her running blindly into the open air. So anxious had she been to flee that horrible place that she had no eyes for what lay in her path. As a result, one heel had trod full on the whitened skull of Rydob the hermit. Dylara's ankle had twisted beneath her, pitching her headlong into a tangle of vines at the base of the steps.

She was up at once; but the injured ankle buckled under her weight and she had fallen again, crying out in agony.

For a little while she had remained there, stroking the injured member, already swollen and turning blue. Finally she got to her hands and knees and, with many pauses, crawled toward the trees ringing the clearing.

How she managed to clamber into the branches of one giant tree and work her way a full fifty feet above the ground, Dylara was never to know. So awful was the pain that her mind seemed numbed; only an unflagging determination drove her on. She stopped at last, on a thick bough and lay there, completely exhausted.

It was comparatively cool there in the shelter of the foliage. Soft jungle breezes stirred the branch gently and she was soon asleep. A bird twittered and cooed close by, and the wind blew lightly across the troubled face, smoothing its tired lines . . .

AND as the weary, pain-wracked girl lay sleeping, four heavily armed men stepped into the clearing and moved stealthily toward the house of Rydob. They entered; and after a few minutes, reappeared at the doorway, to be joined by three other warriors who had come up to the building from the rear.

"It seems hardly possible," Jotan was saying, "for a mere girl to kill a grown warrior. For all we know, another man may have slain Meltor and made off with Dylara."

"It's my guess," said Tamar, "that the girl caught Meltor off guard and stuck a knife in him. She's not like the women we know, Jotan. Hers has been a wild, primitive life, filled with danger. Because of it, she would be far more resourceful than Sepharian women have need of being. Taking a life probably means nothing to her.

"No," he concluded, "I've an idea she's well on her way back to her caves by now."

Javan, impatiently listening to the conversation, touched Jotan's arm nervously.

"There is no point in staying here," he complained. "It will be dark soon, and the jungle is no place to be after sundown."

Jotan smiled wanly and clapped him on the shoulder. "Of course. I have no right to expose you and Tamar to danger on my account.

"We will return to Sephar now. But tomorrow I shall return here with a warrior who is versed in tracking. With his help I should be able to learn what has happened to Dylara."

"We will go with you," Tamar said quietly. And Javan nodded agreement.

The seven entered the game trail and started back toward distant Sephar. Jotan led the way, his wide shoulders drooping disconsolately. It was clear the loss of the lovely cave-girl had hurt him deeply.

The return journey was about half completed when Jotan stopped suddenly and raised a cautioning hand.

"Listen!" he exclaimed softly.

The seven cocked their ears alertly.

Faintly, mingled with the everyday noises of the jungle, came sounds of murmuring voices and the tramp of feet from around a bend in the trail ahead.

"Probably warriors from Sephar, hunting game," Tamar said. "Let's join them; they may have news for us."

Jotan frowned. "Hunters don't go blundering about so carelessly," he reminded. "Hide in the undergrowth until we can make sure."

A moment later, six human figures appeared in the path. Five were fighting-men of Sephar — all well armed. The sixth was a girl in a close-fitting tunic that emphasized the lithe softly-curved body it covered. Her face was set in determined lines as she moved on, looking neither to the right nor the left.

Tamar, lying next to Jotan behind a screen of vines, nudged his friend.

"Alurna!" he breathed. "What can she be doing here?"

"Looks as though Fordak was telling the truth," Jotan whispered. "She *is* mixed up in this. He must have got free and gone to her with the story.

"Well, let her go to Rydob's house. She'll find little there to please her!"

As soon as the princess and her escorts were out of sight, Jotan called his men from their hiding places and they took up their interrupted progress toward Sephar.

CHAPTER XI

From Jungle Depths

URB, the Neanderthal, was beginning to tire. He and his five hairy com-

panions had been on the march since Dyta had risen, and even now the sun was hunting a new lair for the night. From the frequency with which those behind him were stumbling, he judged they, too, were tiring.

But the mountains were close, now. He and his men were almost certain to reach them before darkness came. There they might find caves near grasslands rich in game. Urb's mouth watered and he was aware of being very hungry.

A faint breeze, blowing lightly against their backs, changed its course suddenly and came whipping in from the west. As it flicked across their faces the six Hairy Ones came to an abrupt halt, standing stiffly as though turned to stone.

Urb sniffed in short rapid inhalations, his unkempt visage twisted in a ferocious scowl.

"Men!" he grunted. "The hairless ones! It has been long since we have found such. Hide!"

With a degree of soundlessness surprising in such clumsy bodies, the six Neanderthals faded into the mazes of undergrowth at either side of the path.

HARDLY were they hidden, when Alurna and her five companions came into sight. They were moving slowly, the girl limping slightly from a bruised heel, her sandals scuffed and dusty.

The girl stopped and turned to the others. "Is it much farther, Adbor? I don't think I can take another step."

"Courage, my princess," smiled Adbor, a tall, slender man with a great shock of blond hair. "A short distance more and we shall be there."

Alurna sank down on a fallen log, removed her sandal and rubbed the bruised heel.

"I'm afraid you'll have to carry me from here on," she sighed. "My feet ache terribly."

SILENTLY the foliage parted an arm's length from the girl's half-bent figure, and in the gap were framed the brutal faces of Urb and Mog, the sullen. Urb gave the female only a passing glance; his attention was riveted on the five unsuspecting men. The woman was not armed—the men were; and it was the males who must die before they could bring their weapons into use.

Meanwhile, the stunted mind of Mog, the sullen, was laboriously following an altogether different trend of thought from that of his leader. His unblinking pig-like eyes were intent on the sweetly curved back directly in front of him, and he was increasingly aware of what an altogether desirable bit of femininity this hairless she actually was. His tongue moistened suddenly dry lips and he shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

Urb waited no longer. Slowly he brought up his left hand, caught a small branch between his fingers, then suddenly clenched his fist.

The wood snapped with a sharp clear sound, freezing the five Sepharian guards into instant immobility.

But not for long.

As the sound of breaking wood rose on the still air, six grotesque figures rose in a rough semi-circle about the group in the trail, and simultaneously five mighty stone-incrusted bludgeons were hurled with unbelievable force and accuracy.

The startled Sepharians never succeeded in bringing their own weapons into play. Before they could fully comprehend their danger all five were stretched on the jungle path. Three were dead as they fell, heads crushed like brittle twigs; another died almost

as quickly, his back snapped as a dry branch is snapped beneath the broad feet of Pandor, the elephant.

Only one still lived, a club having dealt him a glancing blow aside the head, laying his flesh open in a great gash and rendering him senseless. Gorb was more adept at making clubs than he was in their use . . .

Five clubs were thrown; there should have been six. Only Mog, the sullen, retained his hold on his murderous weapon. As his fellows loosed their cudgels, Mog sprang forward, caught the paralyzed girl about the waist with one immense hairy arm, and before the others could fathom his intentions, had turned and fled back along the pathway as quickly as his short bowed legs could carry him.

The remaining five watched Mog's hurried flight until he had passed from sight. His purpose in stealing the she was clear; their surprise came only from his way of taking her –and the fact that seldom did a Hairy Man mate with a member of another race. But then Mog was a surly brute, unable to find among his own people a mate willing to endure his temper and moods.

THE Neanderthal men gathered about the bodies of the five guards. Gorb, true to character, took up several of the scattered weapons and examined them closely, noting with envy that they had been fashioned with far greater skill than he possessed. He puzzled long over the bows and arrows, but his limited intelligence could make nothing of them and he finally cast them aside.

At last the five took up their march toward the distant mountains. They moved more cautiously now than before, realizing they might meet more of the hairless men.

Urb, still in the lead, noticed, a while later, that the forest was beginning to thin out. Soon he caught a glimpse of a plain marking the edge of the woods. He paused, nose searching the humid breeze.

They edged forward at a brief guttural command from their leader, until they came to open ground.

Before them, beyond level grassland, rose the gray stone walls of Sephar, looming huge and impressive in the light of early evening. White tuniced warriors lolled before broad gates leading to many stone buildings beyond.

Urb shook his head regretfully. "We must look elsewhere for caves," he said. "To make our homes near here would mean much fighting with the hairless ones. It is better to go where we may live in peace. Come."

With bowed shoulders and awkward shuffling gait the five frightful men turned back for the long journey to the distant caves of their people.

Soon they were filing silently past the five motionless bodies in the center of the trail. And through narrowed, blood-filled eyes, through a red film of hate and pain, Adbor, Sepharian warrior, watched them go, and planned a sanguinary revenge as payment for the death of his four friends and the theft of the princess Alurna, daughter of his king.

TWO hours later, just as the night's first shadows fell across the path, a searching party found his unconscious body face down in the rotting vegetation of the trail. Tenderly they lifted him up, cradling the blond, blood-soaked thatch in their arms, and bore him back to the city. There, men trained and schooled in the treatment of wounds, did all they could to revive the numbed brain of a courageous warrior.

They were only partially successful. With closed eyes Adbor gasped out, in

a few broken sentences, his story of death and abduction. Something of his former strength seemed to come back to him as he spoke. Raising on one elbow, his eyes now wide and staring beyond those about him, he cried out, shrill and loud:

"Give me my spear—my bow! I will follow them! I will—"

His voice broke and he fell back limply. Adbor was dead.

Above that still form men looked at one another in silence and in horror. The Hairy men! Creatures so seldom seen as to be almost mythical, but whose savage and brutal natures were known from horror tales told at many a dinner table and about many a camp fire.

Vulcar was the first to speak. "I must take word to Urim. For the last two hours he has been storming about the palace demanding he be told where Alurna is. Now, I don't know what he will say—or do. . . ."

He shrugged. "Make preparations to send out a searching party the first thing in the morning. I will lead it."

Slowly the hawk-faced warrior set out for the palace with the message that must wither the stalwart heart of him for whom Vulcar cared above all others.

* * *

ALURNA had been conscious of a bobbing, rocking sensation for some time before she opened her eyes to the world about her. For a moment she watched the procession of thick greenery at right angles to the direction in which she seemed to be moving; then sudden recollection flooded her mind and she awoke to the horror of her position.

It was then that she became aware of the hairy back beneath her and a great calloused hand clamped about her wrists.

Instinctively she attempted to struggle free; but the nightmarish brute only tightened his grip and without pausing in his loping gait turned a snarling, bestial countenance toward her. At the sight, Alurna felt her senses reel and she closed her eyes with a shudder of loathing.

Mog, satisfied his captive would remain passive, transferred his attention to the path underfoot. The hairy one was beginning to regret the decision that had cost him the companionship of his fellows. To cross, safely, the miles of jungle and forest between his present position and the caves of his tribe, would require all his strength and cunning.

Alone, armed only with club and spear, he could prove fairly easy prey to any one of many enemies. Jalok, the panther, agile and fearless and wantonly cruel; Conta, the cave bear, who fought on his hind legs; Tarlok, the leopard, beneath whose spotted hide lay such strength that by comparison Mog's stalwart thews were as nothing. And then there was Sleeza, the giant snake, whose slimy coils held the strength of ten Mogs.

Most fearsome of all, however, was Sadu, the lion, tawny of coat and shaggy of mane, whose absolute fearlessness, speed of attack and irascible temper, backed by steel sinews and mighty fangs, caused the balance of jungle folk to give him a wide berth.

Above and about the lumbering monstrosity and its still, white burden, scampered, flew, slunk and crawled the superabundant life of this green world, their voices and movements adding to the vast ocean of sound rising and falling about the ill-assorted pair.

While far behind them came Urb and the others; but the distance between was growing rapidly greater so swiftly was Mog covering the ground.

And then, with almost frightening

suddenness, Dyta, the sun, disappeared from the heavens and darkness fell upon the jungle. The Neanderthal mouthed a few disapproving grunts, peered about nervously, then swung sharply to his left and forced his way through foliage to the base of a great tree.

Alurna clung fearfully to the shaggy neck as the great brute pulled himself into the lower branches. With the coming of night her fear was intensified a thousandfold; but even more than she feared Mog was her dread of the brooding jungle and its savage inhabitants. She reproached herself silently for venturing from the security of Sephar's walls. Woman-like, she blamed Jotan for everything—had he not fallen in love with the cave-girl nothing like this would have happened.

Mog paused upon a broad bough well above the ground. Placing Alurna in a sitting position here, her back against the tree's bole, he tore free a length of stout vine and bound her wrists securely behind her back.

Satisfied his prize would be helpless to escape, Mog let himself down on a branch directly under her and sought a comfortable position in which to sleep out the night.

Alurna, hemmed in by a wall of blackness which her untrained eyes were unable to penetrate, could hear the Hairy One as he settled himself. She knew there would be no sleep for her this night; she was far too frightened to think of closing her eyes for an instant.

Seconds later she was sound asleep; and though the balance of the night was made hideous with the savage voices of jungle denizens, the exhausted princess did not stir.

A ROUGH hand shook her awake. She shrank away with a whimper of fear at sight of Mog's forbidding face a few inches from her own. The Neanderthal freed her wrists by breaking their bonds with his powerful fingers, then swung her once more to his back and slid to the ground.

Noon found them at the outskirts of the forest. Mog had pushed ahead far more quickly than he had thought possible. Alone, without allies, he feared an attack at any moment from some forest dweller. There would be no safety for him until he was safe in the caves of his tribe.

With the forest behind him, Mog trotted across the narrow ribbon of grasses to the lip of the almost vertical cliff overlooking the tree-filled valley below. A portion of the boar killed two days before was cached in one of those trees; once he and his captive were safely down the cliff they could eat without wasting time in a search for food.

But Mog began to realize it would prove no small matter to transport the girl down the abrupt incline. Indeed, it would require all his own strength and limited agility to get himself down without the added burden of a helpless she.

Then came the thought that she might be able to do so without his aid. Not ungently he lowered her to her feet and signed that she should start down. When Alurna, correctly interpreting his gesture, glanced at the hard earth so far below, she gasped aloud and drew back, trembling.

Mog, sullen and short-tempered at best, did not intend wasting time in coaxing her. Raising a bulky fist, he shook it threateningly under her nose, then once more pointed to the edge of the precipice.

Alurna could not help but feel she preferred death by falling to being mauled by this uncouth beast-man. And so, gritting her teeth and tensing her

muscles to control their trembling, she lowered herself over the brink and began the tortuous descent.

Those long agonizing moments which followed were to live forever in the memory of Alurna, princess of Sephar. Slowly, inch by inch, she worked her way downward, feeling in an agony of suspense for footholds where she was confident no such holds existed. At times her entire weight was suspended by her fingers alone, while both feet searched for some projection to which her sandaled foot would cling. She knew, now, it would have been wise to have tossed her sandals down first; her bare feet would have held to the rock with more certainty—but it was too late for that.

Gradually she sank farther and farther from the lip of the escarpment. She dared not glance above or below; her gaze was glued continuously on the uneven surface over which she was passing. Her fingers were raw and bleeding by this time; but she clenched her lip between white teeth and went on.

At last the strain, both to limbs and to nerves, was nearing the breaking point. Alurna knew she could not hold on much longer; if she failed to reach the valley floor soon, she must fall the balance of the way. Then, as the desire to loose her grip, whatever the consequences, seemed too overpowering to resist, her feet came to rest on level ground.

Tired, high-pitched nerves gave way, and Alurna sank to the ground and burst into tears. Had she acted at once, she might have escaped, for Mog was still fifty feet above her.

But she was conscious only of relief from the peril just undergone; and Mog found her huddled in a pitiful heap at the very spot where her feet had first touched solid earth.

Lifting her easily to his wide back, he took up his club from where he had dropped it from above, and moved at a half-trot toward the nearby forest.

While from the depths of a tangled maze of cloaking underbrush, at the very point he was nearing, two baleful yellow eyes were fixed in unblinking attention upon him and the girl he carried!

* * *

THE morning after Alurna's capture, twenty warriors were assembled in front of Sephar's palace. It was evident they awaited someone, for their eyes turned often to the great doors.

And then came Vulcar, arms laden with an assortment of weapons. Rapidly he handed them out to the twenty until each was fully armed. This done he barked out an order and the men formed into ranks, four abreast and five deep.

His hawk-like face set in stern lines, Vulcar faced them. "Warriors of Sephar," he began, "you know what has happened to the daughter of our king. You know, too, that five of your comrades died trying to save her. Most of you knew and admired Adbor. I saw Adbor die. He died while calling for his weapons, eager to take up the trail of those who had stolen the princess.

"To you goes the honor of avenging your comrades and returning the princess to her father, alive . . . or dead."

As the calm voice ceased, a score of right arms shot up and a resounding shout rose from twenty throats.

"Then come," said Vulcar quietly, and turned to lead the way.

But before the men could move to follow him, a deep voice from the palace doorway bade them wait.

Clothed in the simple harness of an ordinary warrior, and fully armed, Urim descended the steps and came up to Vulcar.

"I will go with you," he said simply.

Vulcar had been afraid of this. Urim no longer was a young man; to take him along might cost Sephar a ruler, as well as its favorite daughter.

"O Urim," he said, "may I say a few words to you before we go? . . .

"My king, trust me and these warriors to find Alurna. They are young and fully trained. For hours they can press onward so rapidly that anyone less hardened would drop behind within an hour. To slacken their speed for one less trained might cost much precious time."

Urim, ready to override any protests, could not help but see the logic of the words. For several moments he stood with bowed head while impulse battled with good judgment.

"Take your men and go without me, my friend," he said at last, his voice unsteady. "I am an old man, and useless. I should only delay you."

He turned and stroke back into the palace before the troubled Sepharian could frame a reply.

Ten minutes later the twenty and one entered the trail that led past the scene of Alurna's capture the day before.

* * *

HALF an hour later another band of men filed through the western gates of Sephar and entered the mouth of the same path. There were eight in the group: Jotan, Javan and Tamar with five of the warriors who had come with them on the long journey from Ammad to Sephar. Their destination, now, was the house of Rydob, and with them was a man adept at following a spoor, however faint.

Tarlok, the leopard, crouching among the dense foliage of a thick branch above the trail, watched them pass. Soundlessly he bared glistening fangs, and his yellow eyes narrowed into twin slits of hate. Tarlok detested these two-legged creatures; but even greater was his fear of them, for his mate had fallen, a moon ago, beneath the sharp sticks of such man-things.

CHAPTER XII

Enter—Pryak

HARDLY had word of Alurna's disappearance flashed through Sephar, that same morning, than a young under-priest was seeking admittance to the secret chambers of Pryak, high-priest to the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud.

It was no simple matter to gain the subterranean apartment far beneath the temple. Only a chosen few had ever set foot within the holy-of-holies; this young man was not one of them. But his excited manner and the announcement of information "for Pryak alone" had brought him to the very door of the high-priest's suite. But here he was stopped by Orbar, second only to Pryak, himself.

Tidor was no fool. To be first to acquaint his chief with important information could gain him recognition as a loyal and conscientious follower. Men had risen high with such a beginning.

And so when Orbar sought to learn what word Tidor had brought, he was met by the unchanging retort: "I will tell Pryak—none other!"

Finally Orbar began to lost patience. "You may not see the most-high," he snapped. "Tell me what you know and I will pass it on—if it be worth-while repeating. Come, tell me, or I will teach you what it means to cross Orbar!"

Tidor trembled inwardly. He had heard gossip as to the fate of some who had angered Orbar. He was about to blurt out the news, when there came a

sudden interruption.

The door to Pryak's apartment banged open and a short, frail-appearing man appeared in the doorway. He was well past middle-age, with sparse graying hair that straggled untidily past the neck line of his tunic. His wrinkled face was twisted in anger, and his shifty, close-set eyes of watery blue glared at the two men before him.

"What means this clamor, Orbar?" he demanded shrilly. "By the God, am I to be disturbed by petty wrangling on my own door-step? Who is this youth?"

Orbar's manner was humble, now. "Tidor, an under-priest, has come with word which he claims is of great importance. I tried to learn from him if the information was worthy of your attention, Most High, but he will tell me nothing."

Pryak turned on the young man. "What is this news?"

Tidor gulped. "O Voice of the God," he said shakily, "I have learned that Alurna, daughter of hated Urim, was stolen yesterday while in the jungle. A roving band of Hairy Men killed her guards and took her.

"An hour ago Vulcar and twenty men left to hunt for her. Urim stays at the palace, sick and miserable, waiting Vulcar's return."

Pryak's scowl had deepened as the youth spoke. "And you call that important? What do I care if that soft-hearted fool loses a worthless daughter? A sound whipping will teach you to—"

Suddenly the high priest fell silent. The anger twisting his features began to fade—replaced by a cunning, scheming expression no less repellent. . . .

"And yet," he said slowly, "we may be able to make use of this information. If I could be sure . . . Orbar! Call to my rooms the Council of Priests." He was speaking rapidly, now, his face flushed with excitement. "This may be the day of our deliverance!"

* * *

THARN lay flat on his back on a heap of furs and watched a pattern of sunlight on the wall above his head. Today was his second as a captive, and already his patience was wearing thin. He knew, now, why the other cave-men imprisoned here wore constant expressions of aloof sullenness. To be cooped behind rock walls day after day instead of being free to roam forest and plain as they had done since boyhood, was enough to sour any temper.

He wondered where Katon had been taken. Shortly after the noonday meal, his friend had held a long whispered conversation with two of the guards —a conversation of considerable importance, to judge from Katon's expression. He had said nothing to Tharn about it in the hour between the conference and the arrival of two men who had taken him away.

Tharn gave up trying to find an answer to the puzzle and dozed off. He was awakened a half hour later by the sound of the cell door opening. He raised his head in time to see Katon enter with two palace guards. Without hesitation the three approached Tharn's couch and he rose to meet them.

"Come, Tharn," said Katon hurriedly. "Urim is waiting for you."

The cave man did not move. "Why?" he asked laconically.

"It is my doing," Katon explained impatiently. "I went to him with an idea, and he thinks enough of it to send for you."

Tharn was satisfied. He could trust Katon. Besides, it would be good to quit this dank place—if only for a little while.

Heedless of curious stares from the other prisoners, Tharn and Katon passed from the room, a guard leading

the way. And shortly afterward they stopped before the door of Urim's apartment. In response to their knock, a hollow voice bade them enter.

Tharn could hardly credit his eyes at the change in the man who slumped dejectedly on a couch near the far wall. In place of the proud ruler who had ordered him to the pits, was a hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed old man.

At the entrance of Tharn and the others, Urim slowly lifted his head and looked full into the calm gray eyes of the giant savage. Under their quiet, sympathetic expression a gleam of hope flickered into his own tired eyes and he squared his shoulders.

"Have you told this man of your plan?" he asked Katon.

"No, Urim," replied the Sepharian, "I thought you might wish to do so."

Urim transferred his attention to the cave-man. "Yesterday," he said, "my daughter was taken by a band of Hairy Men. What do you know about such men?"

Tharn smiled. "Since I was a little boy I have heard many stories by men who have fought the Hairy Ones. They are slow and clumsy and do not think quickly. The warriors of my tribe do not fear them."

"Good!" Urim exclaimed. "Now I will tell you why I sent for you.

"When Katon, here, was told by one of the guards that Alurna had been taken, he came to me with a suggestion. He thinks that by reason of your wide knowledge of the world outside our walls, you might be able to trail these Hairy Men to their caves and rescue my daughter—if she still lives.

"Do this, and you and your mate shall go free—and Katon, too. But if you fail to return with Alurna within the moon, the life of your mate is forfeit."

Tharn frowned thoughtfully. "If I do not find your daughter, yet return alone, what reward is mine?"

"None! It would be as though you had not set foot beyond Sephar's gates."

"Which means I must take part in the Games; and Dylara remains a slave." The cave-man was thinking aloud.

Then: "I agree, Urim. I will start at once."

* * *

LITTLE Nobar, the monkey, awakened Dylara by dropping empty bean pods on her upturned face. She blinked in the sunlight filtering through the leaves, and sat up.

Her first thought was that she was actually free. Yet to be accomplished was the task of learning the direction in which lay the caves of her people, then crossing that distance alone, exposed to many dangers.

Dylara, in her accustomed environment, was a resourceful young woman. The prospect of a long journey—just how long a journey she could only surmise—concerned her far less than had the prospects of a lifetime of slavery in Sephar. All her life she had rubbed elbows with jungle beasts. Since infancy the green wilderness of the forest had been her front yard. Night after night she had gone to sleep with the roars of lions and the hunting squalls of leopards for a lullaby. She had learned to respect and avoid Sadu and Tarlok and Jalok—but not to fear them. She knew they hunted man only when other food was denied them—and that was seldom. She knew that a tall tree was a sure haven from all three; for Sadu could not climb at all, while Jalok and Tarlok would not venture among the smaller limbs able to bear her weight but not theirs.

From the freshly risen sun's position Dylara realized she had slept the entire

night on this narrow branch. As she drowsily reviewed the previous day's events, she remembered her injured ankle and bent hurriedly to examine it.

She was relieved to find hardly any swelling there, nor was the damage to strained ligaments so great as she at first had feared. Rising, she tested her weight on the one foot and found that, beyond an occasional twinge, it would support her.

Slowly she worked her way down to earth and stepped into the trail. Here she waited a few minutes, planning her next move. She finally decided to follow the path westward away from Sephar until a cross-trail to the north turned up. Such a route would eventually lead her to the heights from which she had first looked upon Sephar. From that point on, finding the caves of Majok should not be impossible.

She skirted the clearing containing the house of Rydob, walking within the jungle's fringe to avoid being seen by anyone who might be within the building, and soon was traveling due west.

As she moved slowly ahead, limping slightly, she noticed the imprints of monstrous, man-like feet in the dust of the path. At first she examined the marks closely; but her limited woodcraft did not permit their identification, and she gave up trying.

The makers of those strange prints, Urb and his savage band, were plodding westward along the same path only a few hours ahead of the cave-girl.

CHAPTER XIII

Death Stalks the Princess

AS MOG, the sullen, shuffled across the narrow strip of cleared ground toward the game trail into the jungle labyrinth, he was mentally congratulating himself at the ease with which he had obtained a desirable mate. Within little more than a sun from now he would be exhibiting his prize to the envious eyes of the men and the jealous stares of the shes.

Mog was moving down-wind, and so engrossed was he with self-congratulations that he utterly failed to sense the presence of a tawny shape hidden in the thick growth at the trail's mouth.

It was Sadu, the lion, crouching there, massive head flattened to the ground, hindquarters beneath a taut frame, waiting for the approaching prey to move within the radius of his spring.

On came the Neanderthal. Suddenly a terrible roar came from the ground almost at his feet, and a huge body flashed from the cloaking verdure and leaped at the hairy chest of the astonished man-thing.

Mog's reaction was instinctive. As Sadu's roar broke the silence, the Hairy One tossed Alurna aside and swung up his massive club to beat off the attack.

But in vain. Mog had been too well ambushed to stage an effective defense. Full on his shoulders fell the awful weight of the great cat, the club brushed aside as though it did not exist, and Mog went down as though pole-axed.

With wide distended jaws Sadu lowered his head past the futilely flailing arms. There was a sickening crunch of bone as giant fangs closed on the face of the struggling figure, and Mog, the sullen, was no more.

Alurna, prostrate where Mog had tossed her a few feet away, watched the grisly drama with frightened eyes. During the brief interval in which Sadu had made his kill, she might have risen and taken to her heels, but a paralysis of fear kept her motionless.

Now Sadu rose to his feet, shook himself until the thick mane fairly flew, then placed a heavily taloned paw on his prey and turned his leonine head to look slowly about.

At last his round yellow eyes came to rest on the prone figure of the girl. For an endless moment he regarded her with a fixed, unblinking stare; then the wrinkled lips curled back, exposing blood-reddened teeth, while from the cavernous chest came a low growl that coursed up and down the girl's spine like icy fingers.

For what seemed ages to Alurna that stare never wavered. The long graceful body with its tremendous sinews seemed to expand larger and larger until it loomed great as that of an elephant. She could feel a scream of horror and protest forming in her throat; but before it could find utterance; Sadu swung his head back to the corpse and settled down to feed.

Alurna felt a wave of relief so intense she nearly fainted; it required several minutes to beat down her weakness sufficiently to think of escape.

SOME twenty paces to her left towered a mighty tree, its wide branches offering a secure haven could she but reach them. Only half that distance, however, separated her and the lion; and if she made a break for the tree, Sadu could be upon her before she had taken half a dozen steps.

But the beast might not try to stop her. The princess Alurna knew nothing of lions and their habits. Only in the arena during the Games had she seen a live one—and then always from a distance. And so she resolved to lie quiet and wait for the animal to be done with its feeding. Perhaps then it would rise and stalk back into the jungle, leaving her unmolested.

The young woman lay perfectly still, trying to close her ears to sounds of grinding teeth and splintering bones. Once she shut her eyes on the revolting picture of Sadu at dinner, but opened them at once. To watch fragments of Mog disappearing into that monstrous maw was bad enough; but to see nothing, while an overwrought imagination sent the beast slinking toward her, was more than human nerves could endure.

Suddenly Sadu rose from the Neanderthal's body and gave voice to a low ominous growl. Alurna saw that the cat's attention was fixed on something beyond her, and she cautiously turned her head toward the cliff.

A few feet below the upper edge were several man-like figures clinging to the vertical surface. Carefully, each inched its way downward, testing each foot- and hand-hold before continuing on.

For a brief, ecstatic moment the girl took them to be warriors from Sephar; but then she saw they were creatures identical to her late captor, and suddenly heightened hopes plunged to a new depth of misery.

Sadu stood as a statue of bronze, the lazy jungle breeze ruffling his tawny mane, narrowed eyes intent on the slow-moving figures. For several minutes he stood thus, then lowering his head he seized the corpse of Mog by one arm and dragged it from sight deep into the luxurious growth of vegetation beside the trail. Not once during this change of position did he glance toward the watching girl.

The moment Sadu disappeared from view, Alurna sprang to her feet and plunged blindly into the jungle at a point farthest removed from the beast. Her only thought was to put all the distance possible between Sadu and herself. She dared not take to the open for fear the Hairy Men would catch sight of her and hunt her down.

For nearly two hours she struggled on, tearing her way through a tangled confusion of creepers, trees, ferns, broken branches and bushes. Several times she tripped and fell headlong, only to rise and stumble onward. Her

tunic was stained and torn, thorns and branches having ripped the material in many places.

At last, after unwittingly changing her course many times, she sank to the ground beside the bole of a great tree in the center of a small clearing deep within the heart of the primeval forest.

Completely exhausted she lay half-conscious on the soft carpet of grasses, her tortured lungs laboring to bring oxygen to an overtaxed heart. Gradually her eyes closed, her heart slowed its mad tempo, she breathed more calmly as fear left her. As from a great distance came the low monotonous hum of insects, the subdued twitter of birds and rustlings from many leaves. Alurna slept . . .

WHEN she sat up, several hours later, the glade was filled with the half-light that presages nightfall. She stood up and looked about, aware of the danger she had courted by sleeping on the ground in a territory where savage animals were so plentiful.

Abruptly the fading dusk deepened into darkness. The girl's tiny supply of courage fled with the light, leaving a frightened child to grope her way to the base of the lofty tree, where she managed to climb among the branches.

Here she found two thick boughs close together and extending horizontally outward in about the same plane. Sitting with her back against the rough trunk, she stretched tired legs along the two branches and composed herself to wait for the dawn.

Scarcely was she settled than the scream of a great cat sounded beneath her, and she heard the animal on the ground at the foot of the tree. For a short time it circled the clearing, then came the sound of rustling undergrowth and Jalok, the panther, was gone.

That night was the longest Alurna had ever known. The chill dampness of the nocturnal jungle penetrated to the innermost parts of her body until she was certain she would never again be warm. The single thin garment she was wearing was no protection; in fact, it added to her discomfort by absorbing moisture from the damp air.

Later, the heavy blackness about her was dispelled by rays of the full moon as it climbed until it seemed to hang close to the mighty tree that sheltered her. So bright was the glare that Alurna could see objects so small as to escape notice during the day. Several times she saw tiny rodents scurrying across the clearing, and once she saw little Sleeza kill and swallow a field mouse.

Twice she heard large bodies moving in the tangled fastness about the clearing, but what made the sounds remained a mystery. At frequent intervals the savage roars and screams of fierce beasts reached her ears, but always from a distance.

At last the seemingly endless night began to wane, and near daybreak the girl dozed fitfully.

When next she opened her eyes the sun had risen, flooding the glade with life-giving, hope-reviving rays. Alurna rose, unkinked muscles cramped from long hours in an unfamiliar position, and descended slowly to the ground. She was aware of being very hungry as well as possessed of a raging thirst. Acting on these needs she entered the forest to search for water and food.

SHORTLY thereafter, and solely by chance, she came to a small swift-moving mountain stream. Here she knelt and drank deep of the cold water, then, greatly refreshed, rose, and set about gathering fruit from the plentiful supply everywhere about her.

After eating, she bathed in the river,

its waters soothing to the scratches and bruises of yesterday's mad dash through the jungle.

By the time she had dressed again, the sun was quite high. While she had been in the water she had caught sight of a narrow game trail leading in the direction she was confident Sephar lay. Spirits soaring, she started out for home, her step springy with confidence.

By noon the sun's heat had become so oppressive that she stopped in the shelter of a tree to rest. She was tempted to climb into the branches and sleep for a while; but the thought of being forced to spend another night in this wilderness drove away that temptation. It could not be much farther, she reasoned, before the base of the great plateau about Sephar was reached.

Her sweat-streaked face set in stubborn lines, the daughter of Urim stepped once more into the trail and plodded doggedly on. And every step was taking her farther and farther from her home.

It was not long after, that Tarlok, the leopard, his belly empty from a night of fruitless hunting, caught scent of her. Slowly, with infinite stealth, he slunk upwind, keeping within the jungle's edge until he caught sight of the girl's bowed shoulders.

Tarlok's jowls dripped with anticipation. Of all creatures known to him, none was more easily taken than man. A quick stalk, a sudden spring—and once again Tarlok would feed.

Nearer and nearer he approached, moving warily lest the girl take alarm and climb high into some tree. When almost abreast of her, he boldly stepped into the trail, not ten feet behind his unsuspecting prey.

It was then that Alurna, warned perhaps by some subtle sense, turned around.

VULCAR of Sephar and his band of twenty warriors having safely descended the precipice at the same point where Alurna had inched her way down earlier that day, assembled at the mouth of a pathway into the unchartered wood before them.

"They probably came this way," Vulcar said. "Look about for some sign of their passage."

A few minutes later a shout of triumph from one of the party brought the others to his side. He was pointing to a mark in the trail's dust—the large square imprint of a great flat foot, grotesquely human.

Vulcar smiled with grim satisfaction. "We are on the right track," he declared. "Let us go on; we have work to do."

As unwittingly as though it did not exist they passed the spot where their princess had entered the jungle. They did not see the broken and twisted greenery in the forest wall, and had they done so they could not have interpreted its meaning.

The men of Urb, versed in jungle lore, had found her trail at once, just as they had picked out Mog's bones where Sadu had left them. But Urim's daughter held no interest for any one of them, and they had made no effort to track her down.

For the balance of the day Vulcar and his companions pushed ahead on their mission of rescue—or revenge. Because they were smaller and more active they covered ground much more quickly than their bulky quarry. Consequently they were rapidly overtaking the five Neanderthals.

Near sunset the winding path debouched into a small clearing, through which ran a fair-sized stream. Here the pursuers found the first positive indication they were on the right track. On the near bank of the river were

ashes of a small fire, still warm to the touch. Scattered about it were the gnawed bones of Muta, the boar—already picked clean by hordes of ants.

At first, Vulcar's men had clamored to dash ahead in hot pursuit. But the hawk-faced leader decided against it, saying a short rest and full bellies would help them to fight better than if they were worn and hungry.

"But if we wait," argued one, "the Hairy Men may reach their caves. We cannot fight against an entire tribe of them."

Vulcar shook his head. "Had they been close to their caves," he pointed out, "they would not have stopped to eat and rest. No; we will stop for a little while and eat of the food we carry; then we can go on even more quickly than before.

"Five of us will go slightly ahead of the others. In case the Hairy Men find that many are following them they may run away. If they see only five, however, they are sure to attack. Then the balance of us will fall upon them!"

There was no gainsaying the soundness of Vulcar's plan. Even the most action-eager warrior saw its beauty. And so the men dropped to the ground beside the river, ate of the cured strips of meat carried in their shoulder pouches, and drank from the river.

After a short rest period, Vulcar called them together and gave the word that began the last stage of the journey.

* * *

WHILE only a short distance ahead, Urb and his four companions plodded slowly on toward their distant homes.

Darkness was not far in the offing, and Urb was inwardly debating on ordering the men to the trees for the night, when Tolb, at the rear of the column, voiced a low note that arrested the others in mid-stride. Turning as one, the five stood motionless, their ears, keen as those of Sadu, himself, cocked to catch and interpret what Tolb had heard.

Urb, wise old campaigner, was first to identify the sounds. "Men!" he grunted. "The hairless ones! Hide."

Silently each Neanderthal man stepped behind a trunk of one of the trees lining the path. Mighty clubs swung ready in steel fingers; narrowed eyes beneath overhanging brows scanned the open ground of the trail. The minutes lengthened. . . .

And then five white-tuniced figures appeared at the far end of the path and came on at a half-trot. Slung across their shoulders were short bows; at their backs hung arrow-filled containers, and in their right hands dangled clubs, smaller than those used by the Neanderthals but still formidable weapons.

Not until the group had drawn abreast the ambushers did Urb give the signal. Then his fingers closed on a dry branch, and five immense bludgeons hurtled toward the startled Sepharians.

It requires far more skill to hit a moving target than a stationary one. Then, too, the half-light near the end of day does not add to the chances of a successful cast.

Three of the clubs missed their marks altogether, one struck a shoulder glancingly, while the fifth crashed into the base of a neck, snapping the spine and killing the stricken man instantly.

Behind the cudgels blundered the Hairy Ones, drawing flint knives as they came. If they had expected to catch the enemy unprepared and demoralized, however, they were badly disappointed.

A barrage of Sepharian clubs flashed to meet them. Two found marks: one striking Kor alongside the skull,

knocking him flat; the other caught Urb, himself, a glancing blow atop the head that made his knees buckle briefly.

The Neanderthal chieftain recovered quickly and with an angry bellow sprang at the nearest white-clad figure. Disregarding the darting knife, Urb caught him by the tunic with one hand and drove his fist with inhuman force full into the Sepharian's face.

There was a dull crunching sound of crumpling bones and the hairless one slumped forward, his face from hairline to chin driven through the back of his head.

The two remaining guards were still in the fight, seeking to out-maneuver their less agile foemen and knife them from behind. The shifting feet stirred up dust from the trail until a cloud enveloped the fighters.

And then a ringing shout echoed above the panting, twisting bodies, and into battle came the balance of the Sepharians.

At sight of these enemy reinforcements, Urb and his three remaining henchmen turned and fled, leaving the fallen Kor where he lay. The newcomers pursued them for a short distance, then, seeing they were empty-handed, turned back.

VULCAR called his men together, determined the extent of any injuries, then turned his attention to the bodies in the trail. Coolly he ran his knife through the throat of the still stunned Kor. A brief examination proved the other two casualties to be quite dead.

After detailing four men to scoop out shallow graves for their late comrades, Vulcar sent the others into the foliage on either side of the trail to find Alurna. He believed she had been bound and gagged to prevent any warning of the ambuscade, and he pictured her as lying helpless nearby, awaiting release.

Until long after darkness, Vulcar and his men searched for their princess. Again and again they shouted her name, straining to catch an answering cry that did not come. Finally, after hours of systematic effort, in which every inch of ground for yards around was combed, the realization came that Urim's daughter was as lost to them as though they had remained in Sephar.

To Vulcar, the awful truth came as a sickening blow. So certain of success had he been at learning they were close on the heels of the Hairy Men, that the final disappointment almost drove him mad. All he could see was hopeless suffering dulling Urim's eyes and lining his face . . . Vulcar beat his fists together in impotent fury at his own helplessness.

Reluctantly he gave the signal to abandon the search, and with bowed shoulders and bent head the captain led his command back toward Sephar and a waiting father.

* * *

DYLARA sat beside a tiny brook and allowed its cool waters to chill her aching ankle. It had begun to swell again from the strain of a full day's slow progress, even though she had stopped many times to give it rest.

An hour from now it would be sunset. Soon the forest denizens would be coming here to drink. Soon, too, would come the meat-eaters, to lurk beside the pathway, awaiting Bana and Neela, whose succulent flesh they loved.

The cave-girl bent and washed the dust from her hands and face, drying the skin with grass. Then she rose and retraced her steps to the base of a tall tree. Favoring her ankle as best she could, Dylara climbed well above the ground, sought and found a properly placed limb on which she could spend the night, and fell promptly into

dreamless sleep.

SHE had no more than closed her eyes when a group of eight men passed below the branches of her tree and stopped at the water's edge. One of the eight walked slowly back and forth on the near bank, his head lowered, studying the ground.

He halted suddenly, stooped lower, eyes intent on something there. Then he beckoned to the others.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "There, in the mud. See those marks? She sat here, bathing her feet. And here!—here are the prints of bare feet."

Jotan, following the pointing finger, nodded, his handsome face shining. "They must be hers. Are they recent, Modilk?"

"So recent," said the long-faced Modilk solemnly, "that the slave-girl must be within a few minutes of us."

Javan spoke now, his voice worried. "Where are we to spend the night, Jotan? The big cats will be hunting soon; we must find a safe place."

Jotan slapped his friend's shoulder comfortingly. "We'll find Dylara first," he said, "then make camp for the night. A circle of brush fires will keep the lions and leopards away."

The eight men waded the stream, not bothering to remove their sandals, and pressed on into the north.

While a stone's throw behind them, aloft in the branches of a leafy tree, slept the girl they were seeking.

CHAPTER XIV

Forest Trails

"IT WAS here we found the dead guards. Where, or in what direction, the Hairy Men took Alurna is not known. Vulcar and his men followed this trail away from Sephar."

The guard detailed to show Tharn the scene of Alurna's capture had told all he knew. To the cave man it more than sufficed; following a trail left less than a sun before would not tax his prowess.

"You have told me enough," Tharn assured him. "Hasten back to your chief and tell him I will return soon—his daughter with me."

The Cro-Magnard, a slight smile touching his lips, watched the retreating figure until it disappeared around a bend of the trail. Even then he did not move, but stood quiet, arms folded across his swelling chest, drawing great draughts of humid air deep into his lungs.

Free! Gone were stone walls, cold floors and barred doors. No longer must he go only where others permitted. There were soft grasses and growing things about him. Overhead was the limitless blue of space; and there was Dyta, the sun, sending golden spears to prick, with welcome heat, the smooth skin of the cave lord.

Siha, the wind, moving in little eddies and gusts, brought to his nostrils a heavy pungent cloying odor belonging only to the jungle; the combined essence of uncounted varieties of plants, together with the comingled scent of endless small life that makes of the jungle a teeming city in itself. Overhead, little Nobar, the monkey, sat on a low-hanging branch and scolded roundly the two-legged creature in the trail below.

Yes, it was good to be free again. Good to know the pure pleasure of unlimited vistas of trees and plains. A vision of his father's caves and the members of his tribe rose before him, bringing the pangs of homesickness. But superimposed on the familiar scene came, unbidden, the lovely face and

softly rounded figure of Dylara.

Siha veered sharply and came sweeping at right angles across the path. Tharn stiffened for strong in his nostrils was the scent of Tarlok, the leopard. He was instantly alert—a wary jungle denizen who wheeled and faced upwind, eyes narrowed, the sharp blade of flint ready in his right hand.

The strength of the great cat's scent faded as the creature moved farther away. Whether or not it had caught Tharn's scent did not interest the caveman, now; a retreating danger ceased to be of interest.

For a few minutes Tharn carefully went over the floor of the trail at the point where the abduction had taken place, as well as the neighboring undergrowth. Soon he found the several hiding places of the Hairy Ones; and a bit later he came upon the delicate footmarks of Alurna within the trail itself. One of these prints was almost obliterated by the broad square mark of a great naked foot; it was here Mog's initial leap had ended beside the girl.

Dropping to hands and knees, Tharn placed sensitive nostrils close to the marks. To that unbelievably keen organ was borne the individual scent spoor of Alurna, as well as that of Mog, the sullen. Immediately there were engraved on Tharn's memory, scent impressions he would recognize among a hundred others for a long time to come.

He found more of Mog's footprints, all leading along the path and away from Sephar. He followed these, increasing his pace when they showed no indication of swerving from the trail.

Satisfied that locating Alurna's captor was only a matter of following the path underfoot, Tharn went on. He felt no inclination to hurry. Too long had he been denied freedom from supervision The sooner he found the missing girl, the sooner he must return to Sephar—even though he and Dylara were to be freed the moment he returned.

AS HE strolled along, he was reminded of the bow and arrows hanging at his back—these and a stone knife and a grass rope were the weapons he had chosen when preparing to leave Sephar.

The bow, he found, was fashioned from a hard black wood. Its inner surface was nearly flat; the outer quite round. Both ends were gracefully tapered, each notched to hold a string of catgut.

The arrows were made from the same wood as the bow. Their heads were of flint, painstakingly shaped into the likeness of a small leaf, and exceedingly sharp. Each head was fitted snugly into a deep groove, packed about with a clay-like substance and hardened by fire until nearly impossible to loosen. Near the butt of each arrow a thin rounded bit of wood had been inserted to guide its flight.

Bordering the trail some fifty paces ahead, stood a small tree. During some recent storm a lightning bolt had torn a jagged streak in its bole, close to the ground, leaving a strip of white wood gleaming in the sun.

Partly through accident and partly by clear reasoning, Tharn drew the bow with the finished technique of a veteran archer. His left arm, stiffly extended, pointed straight at the selected mark; his right hand, fingers hooked about the string, came smoothly back to a point just below the lobe of his right ear.

There sounded a singing "twang" and a polished bolt flashed in the sunlight, passed the tree's bole by a good foot and disappeared into the foliage.

Tharn ruefully rubbed an angry welt on his left wrist where the bowstring had stung him. He understood, now, why many of Sephar's warriors wore wristbands.

With his knife he hacked off a strip of his loin cloth. This he bound about his left wrist, then took up the bow, his chin set in determined lines.

On his third attempt he hit the mark, sending an arrowhead deep into the center of the white patch.

The cave-man all but shouted aloud. Lovingly he ran his palms over the black wood. No matter what he had suffered at Sepharian hands, they had repaid many times over by disclosing to him the power in a gut-strung branch. Now in truth was he lord of the jungle! He pictured Sadu dead, a few well-placed arrows in his carcass. And shaggy-coated Conta, the cave-bear; of what protection his tough hide against such keen-tipped shafts?

Clearly, Tharn had forgotten the mission that had sent him into the jungle. Everything ceased to exist for him except the bow in his hands and the quiver of arrows at his back. Although he continued on toward the west, his progress was slow and uncertain; for the cave-man was determined to become an expert bowman without delay.

AT FIRST he was content to use nothing more difficult than tree trunks as targets; but as he increased in skill his ambition led him to seek more difficult marks.

Nobar, the monkey, industriously occupied in searching the hairs on his belly for dried bits of dead skin, almost fell from his perch in fright as something streaked past his nose with a vicious hiss. With the nimble alacrity of his kind he rocketed thirty feet upward, where, from a swaying vine, he hurled a torrent of verbal abuse at the grinning youth in the trail below.

The hours sped by, but Tharn never noticed. At first he lost almost every arrow he shot, but little by little his skill was increasing. He attempted drawing the bow with either hand; he sought to release a second arrow before the first had struck; he shot at birds on the wing.

Darkness came upon him without warning. Then it was he remembered he had not eaten since morning. An inventory of his supply of arrows revealed only eight remained of the full two dozen he had brought from Sephar.

He would sleep now. In the morning he would find food and water. And he would make his kill with an arrow—of that he was determined. The bow had proved a wonderful toy; when Dyta came Tharn would prove its practical worth. . . .

WITH the first rays of the morning sun Tharn slid from his arboreal couch and set out at a rapid trot along the trail into the west. An hour later he was crossing the narrow belt of grasses bordering the precipice overlooking a forest-filled valley.

Here he found where Mog and Alurna had started their tortuous descent. Here, too, were signs of the passage of other Neanderthals, and those of Vulcar's searching party.

Before descending the cliff, Tharn turned back to the plain in search of food. Not long after, he had completed a successful stalk of Narjok, the horned deer, and brought it down with a single arrow. After devouring a generous quantity of raw flank-meat, he drank deep of the waters of a small spring and came back to the brink of the precipice.

Tharn went down that vertical cliff-side as though it were a broad stair-

case. At the base he found a tangle of overlapping footsteps leading straight toward a game trail leading into the nearby jungle. Toward its mouth moved the young giant; and so confident was he that Alurna had been carried along this path that only by chance did he keep from losing valuable time.

As the Cro-Magnard neared the trees, the undergrowth parted with a slight rustle, and Gubo, the hyena, slunk deeper into the forest.

At the first sound of disturbed brush, Tharn had pivoted about and with unthinkable quickness unslung his bow and fitted an arrow into place. At sight of cowardly Gubo he smiled and relaxed; but before he turned back to the trail, he saw signs of a recent struggle in the matted grass close by. It might have nothing to do with the business at hand—and, again, it might.

A brief investigation gave him the complete picture. Here, Mog had gone down beneath Sadu; a few paces away were the broken grasses where Alurna had been tossed. He knew, without troubling to look, that Mog's bones were bleaching behind yonder wall of verdure.

Well, the Hairy One was dead; it would save Tharn the task of killing him. Now all that remained was to take the trail of the frightened girl at the place where she had plunged blindly into the dark waste of jungle. She could not have gotten far; and, except for the unlikely chance that one of the big cats had pulled her down, his mission should be finished before nightfall.

Delaying no longer, Tharn took up the trail of the princess, forging rapidly ahead and following with ease the evidence of her hurried flight.

Soon he came to the tiny clearing in which Alurna had spent the previous night. Circling about, he quickly picked up her trail out of the glade, went on across a short stretch of jungle and out onto the banks of a little stream.

Here he found traces of small sandals in the soft mud. That these had not been even partially obliterated by prowling beasts was evidence of the spoor's freshness.

By this time the midday heat was at its strongest. Tharn paused long enough to slake his thirst, then set out along the same pathway taken by Alurna not long before.

A half hour later he was moving steadily ahead at a half trot, expecting to come upon the girl at any moment.

Suddenly he came to a full stop, head thrown back, sensitive nostrils searching the light breeze. And then he moved —as lightning moves.

Only the trembling of leaves marked where he had entered the trees overhead.

CHAPTER XV

Treachery

IN THE apartment of Pryak, far beneath the temple of the Sepharian god, a number of priests were grouped about a long table. At its head sat the high priest, Pryak; at his right was Orbar, second in command. The balance of the stools were occupied by six underpriests, all stern, silent men of middle-age, with that air of inflexible righteousness which appears to be the hallmark of their kind.

Pryak, his close-set eyes of watery blue blazing with an inner fire, rose from his chair.

"For many moons," he began, choosing his words carefully, "the loyal servants of the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken have been forced to bow to the unjust commands of a hated oppressor. Now the time is at hand to end this oppression. The way has

been shown to me by our God; listen closely, for the future of the priesthood in Sephar depends on how faithfully my orders are carried out.

"This is my plan. . . ."

For nearly an hour the high priest spoke without interruption. His cold, crisp sentences seemed to explode in the listeners' faces. Twice, old Cardon, grizzled from passing years of service for his God, half rose from his stool, words of protest forming on his lips. But each time the mad glare of Pryak's eyes gave him pause.

When the high-priest had concluded, he watched the faces of his audience, waiting for his words to sink home. Much depended upon their reaction.

Somehow the very audacity of Pryak's plan seemed to carry weight with the underpriests. Smiles of admiration appeared on several faces; one of the Council chuckled openly. Cardon, alone, seemed unconvinced; but he knew well his chief would brook no interference once he had determined to act.

Pryak was satisfied. "It is agreed, then," he said. "We meet in the Room of the God at the hour named; the others will have their instructions before then and all will be in readiness."

* * *

IN THE palace throne-room, Urim, ruler of Sephar, sat slouched in his chair atop the dais. Despite the grief and worry from loss of his daughter, Urim was determined his duties should not be shirked because of personal sorrow.

The late morning audience was nearly over. Save for a few citizens and a handful of guards attending the king, the hall was empty. In another hour Urim could return to his private quarters.

A guard entered the room and moved directly to the foot of the dais. Head bowed, he waited for permission to speak.

"What is it, Mosark?" Urim asked dully.

"Pryak, Voice of the God, is outside asking for an immediate audience. With him are more than a score of priests."

Urim pursed his lips in surprise. What could have gotten into that gabbling old fool to seek out one who despised him and his kind? Once a year Pryak came to the palace with a group of his attendants to discuss the rites held during the Sacrificial Games. It must be that reason Pryak was here now, although he was much earlier than usual.

Best see him and get it over with. He was very tired; perhaps he could sleep a little during the afternoon. Time passed quickly when spent in sleep; by evening Vulcar should be back, either with Alurna or with word she would never return. This uncertainty of her fate was what he found unbearable; if only he could *know*. . . .

More likely he would get the truth from the barbarian whom Katon had recommended so highly. Everything about that young man emphasized his fitness to cope with the wilderness and its savage life. There was a keen alert mind behind those fine gray eyes—and a body well able to carry out the dictates of that mind.

"What shall I tell him, Urim of Sephar?"

Urim shook off his thoughts. "Bring him in," he said resignedly. "His men, too—let them all in. Except for their wagging tongues they are harmless."

At Pryak's entrance, Urim rose and nodded briefly in formal recognition of the other's office, then sat down again. The high-priest acknowledged the nod as curtly, and came close to the dais.

The balance of the priests spread out in a rough half circle close behind their leader. Urim noticed all were clad in the long, loose-sleeved robes ordinarily worn only during the rainy season. None was armed, it being forbidden for members of the priesthood to bear weapons.

Pryak was quick to notice that which he had foreseen and counted upon: the relaxed watchfulness and lack of discipline among the handful of armed men attending the king. This, he knew, was due to Vulcar's absence from Sephar; had not the hawk-faced captain gone after Alurna, Pryak would have feared to put his plan into execution. Vulcar had always been suspicious of the priesthood; twice he had warned Urim that Pryak was overly ambitious.

"O Urim," began Pryak, "the Games honoring our God begin soon. Before then I mean to show how mistaken you are in your ill-advised interference with the laws of worship. It is I, Pryak, Voice of the God, who shall say how He is to be honored. I must warn you, if you persist in meddling, your God may turn against you and your people, sending sickness to take its toll, and causing your hunters to return empty-handed from the forests.

"Only a sun ago your own daughter was taken by the Hairy Man. Can you say her loss was not due to your—"

THE arch-priest was permitted to go no further. Urim's face had grown steadily darker as mixed anger and amazement rendered him speechless. But mention of Alurna brought strength to his tongue.

Voicing a cry of rage, Urim leaped to his feet. His words were loud against the room's sudden hush.

"Silence, mangy son of Gubo! Must my time be wasted by your senseless chatter? I have told you that cruelty has no place in our faith. Too many times have I told you this; if you speak of it again, the God shall have a new 'Voice'—one able to recognize my authority!"

By this time Tidor, the neophyte, had edged his way past the flank of Urim's guards, slipping stealthily from sight behind the frustum. Here he paused, drew a long stone knife from the folds of a sleeve, then stole cautiously up the serrated side of the dais.

Tidor's heart swelled with pride. It was not every young, untried priest who could be relied upon to carry out so important a mission. Pryak had promised him much if he succeeded. Even if half those promises was kept, Tidor would rank high among his fellows.

Crouching low, Tidor clutched his knife tighter within his fingers—then silently and swiftly he sprang!

A swelling cry of horror from the guards halted Urim's ringing words, and he whirled about as a white-clad figure closed upon him. Before he could lift his hands in defense, a slender blade flashed evilly in a brief arc before striking deep into his breast.

Death came instantly to Urim of Sephar; and his body rolled limply down the steps of the dais, nearly upsetting Pryak as it struck the floor.

Tidor's moment of victory was short-lived. One of the guards snatched a knife from his belt and flung it, point-foremost, with all his strength.

Tidor screamed once in pain and terror as the heavy blade sank hilt-deep into his neck. Then his knees gave way and he fell face down across the great chair. Urim was avenged.

And now the momentary paralysis of the guards snapped like an overdrawn bowstring. Seizing their weapons they threw themselves at the priests with the

commendable intention of butchering the lot. But in place of an unarmed and fear-stricken group of priests, they were confronted by an orderly band of unflinching men, each with a long knife drawn from the folds of his left sleeve.

The guards skidded to a halt in open-mouthed astonishment at this feat of legerdemain; and Pryak, quick to take advantage of their baffled state, scrambled atop the dais and cried out to gain their attention.

"Hold!" he shouted. "In the name of your God! Heed my words before His wrath falls upon you! Urim is dead because he would be greater than his God. Would you suffer the same fate?"

THE guards shifted uncertainly. The words cut through the red curtain of their fury, weakening the resolution to wipe out, in blood, the result of their own negligence. But fear of their God—already strong enough in man to be basic—stiffened their limbs and flooded their hearts with indecision.

Had they a leader, someone to rally them to action, Pryak and his followers would have been dead within seconds. But the wily arch-priest had foreseen that, with Vulcar away, there would be none hardy enough to oppose him in taking the entire city.

"Drop your knives!" Pryak put into his voice all the force and depth he could muster. "Let those who are loyal to their God drop to their knees and ask that He accept them into His service. Delay not, lest He strike you down as unworthy!"

One by one dead Urim's warriors sank to their knees and bowed their heads. Soon there was none within the chamber who remained erect, save Pryak and the Council of Priests. This latter group had huddled together close to the door during the excitement; only after all danger had passed did they resume their habitual expressions of arrogance . . .

From his elevated position Pryak looked down with mingled elation and disbelief at the many bent backs and lowered heads. Frantically his crafty brain sought for some means of making this triumph final and complete.

An inspiration struck him, then, and he lifted his hands high and turned his face toward the ceiling.

"Let no one move or speak!" he commanded loudly. "The All-powerful is speaking words of wisdom and guidance for my ears, alone. Let there be silence while I receive His message!"

A shiver ran through the kneeling men. The God was actually looking down into this room, seeing all that went on, and doubtless ready to blast anyone foolhardy enough to interrupt His message.

For some minutes Pryak remained as motionless as a figure hewn from stone. Arms and neck must have ached from their unnatural position, but not the tiniest muscle trembled under the strain. At last his arms dropped to his sides and his head resumed its normal position.

"Arise!" he called out; and when the now thoroughly subdued guards and the under-priests had obeyed, he said:

"The God is pleased that unworthy Urim is dead, and suggests his passing serve as warning to others as blind. He commands me to rule in Urim's place, and orders His people to honor their God and make offerings to Him as they did before Urim was king.

"And now let all leaders and subjects of palace and city be told I am king; and at the time of the morning audience, tomorrow, I shall speak to them from the palace courtyard. Go!"

When only the Council of Priests and Pryak, himself, remained in the

throne-room, the new ruler gave them their orders.

"The city is ours," he said, "and we shall make its people recognize my power. Each of you will mingle with Sephar's citizens, spreading word of how they will benefit by this change.

"Also you will tell of the lavish Games to start within the next few days —far earlier than usual. Make them understand that even the greatest city of all Ammad has never provided such entertainment as I will give them. When they hear this, they will forget any resentment they may hold toward us; for most of them care not who rules, so long as the Games are exciting.

"Go now, and return here when darkness comes. Orbar, arrange for these bodies to be removed and thrown to the beasts. Report to me when you have done so; there are orders I want given to the palace attendants. For the time being you are to serve as captain of the guards."

CHAPTER XVI

Return to Sephar

FOR the first time since she had started out that morning, Alurna was beginning to question her opinion of where Sephar lay. She sought to push out the thought lest it became certainty and bring utter panic in its wake.

She forced her mind into other channels. How silent the jungle had become! Somehow its spells of stillness were harder to bear than the most sinister of sounds. Unconsciously she strained her ears for some sound to relieve this feeling of complete loneliness.

Something was moving in the trail behind her!

Alurna was turning, even as her brain received the warning. Standing in the path was Tarlok, the leopard, less than ten paces away.

Stricken dumb with terror, Alurna could only gaze wide-eyed at that sleek, spotted head. The narrowed yellow eyes, the white teeth with four long fangs predominated, the back-curling lips drawn into a grimace of blood-lust, even the somehow ludicrous long white hairs on the upper lip — all were stamped indelibly within her mind.

Tarlok was enjoying himself. The utter fear expressed in every line of his prey's face and body appealed to the cruelty in his nature. Purely as a means of adding to that fear, he made a little half-spring toward the girl.

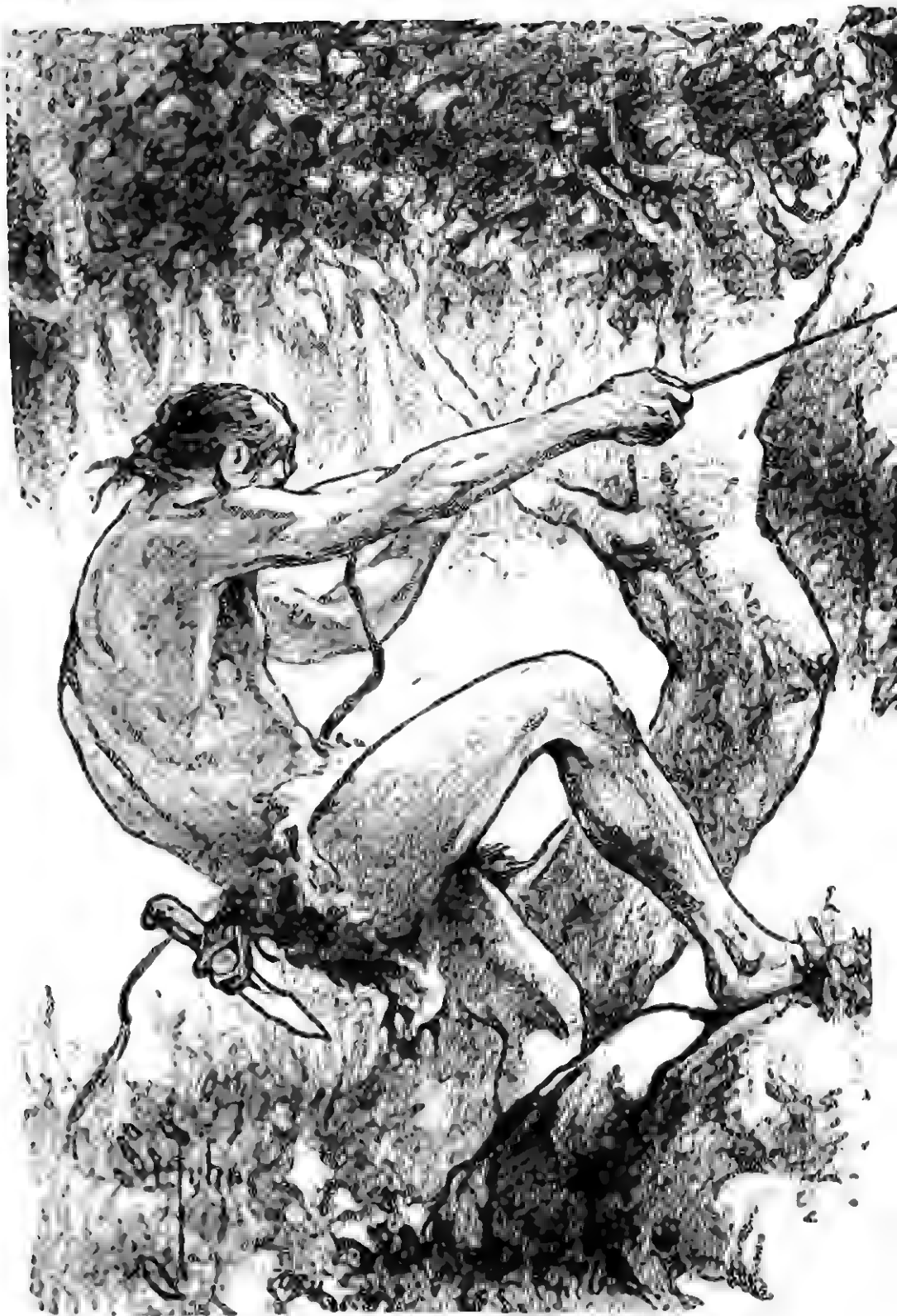
Voicing a half-mad sob of absolute despair, Alurna sank to her knees and closed her eyes to wait for a horrible death.

There followed an agonizing few moments of silence. Why did death delay? Alurna fought to keep her eyes tight shut; but terror plucked at the lids, forcing them open. Hardly more than a yard away was the cat's sleek, savage head!

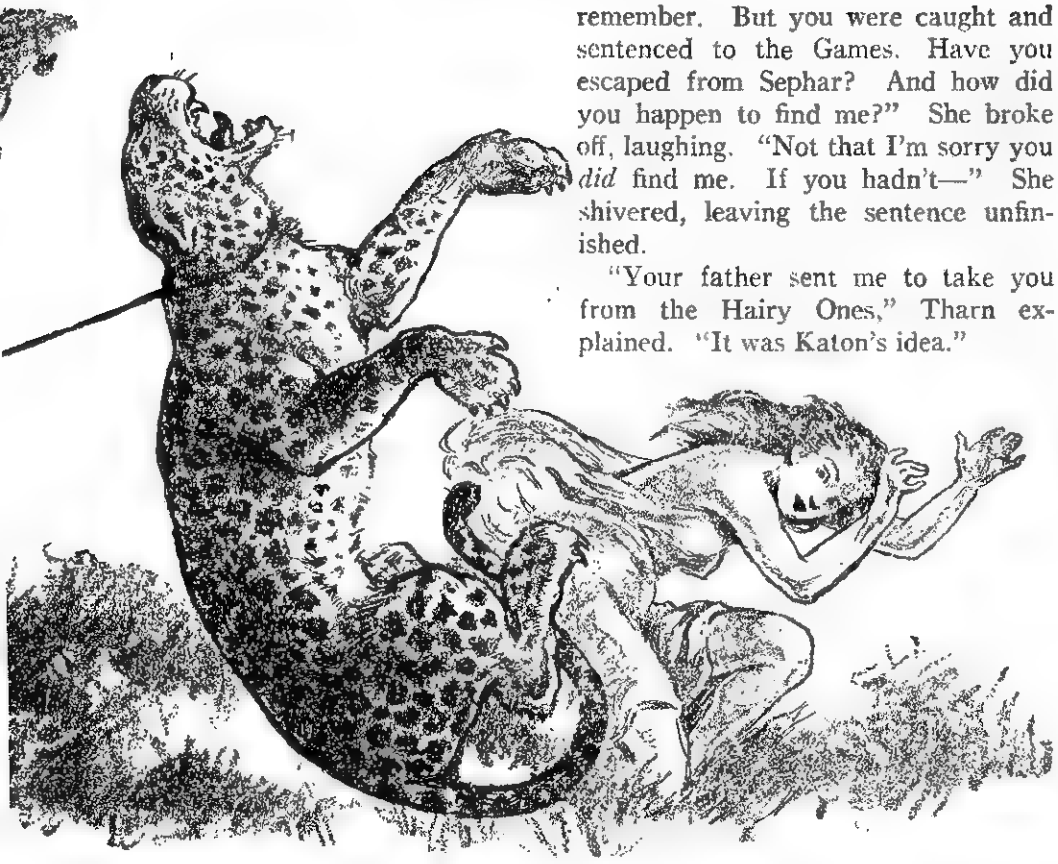
And then something hissed through the air between the girl and the beast. Emitting a shrill scream of surprise and anger, Tarlok reared high above the kneeling figure. That awful sound was more than Alurna's taut nerves could withstand, and she toppled forward into merciful unconsciousness . . .

HER next conscious sensation was that of flying, and she shuddered, believing it the brief delirium preceding death. But as the floating feeling endured, she slowly opened her eyes and saw that she was being borne through the forest top in the arms of a half naked man.

"The leopard?" she said weakly. "What happened? How—"



A rope hissed through the air and Tarzan roared high



A slight smile touched the man's strong, finely-shaped lips, lighting up his handsome, tanned face. "Tarlok is dead," he said. "It was very close; my rope caught him just in time."

He halted and placed her in a sitting position on a strong branch, then sat down beside her. "I was beginning to think you would never open your eyes again," he continued. "We have come a long way since I picked you up in the trail."

Alurna was staring intently at him as he talked. "I have seen you somewhere, before."

Again the man smiled. "Yes," he said. "You have seen me before. It was only a few nights ago that I entered your room while the palace guards were hunting me."

"Of course!" Alurna exclaimed. "I remember. But you were caught and sentenced to the Games. Have you escaped from Sephar? And how did you happen to find me?" She broke off, laughing. "Not that I'm sorry you *did* find me. If you hadn't—" She shivered, leaving the sentence unfinished.

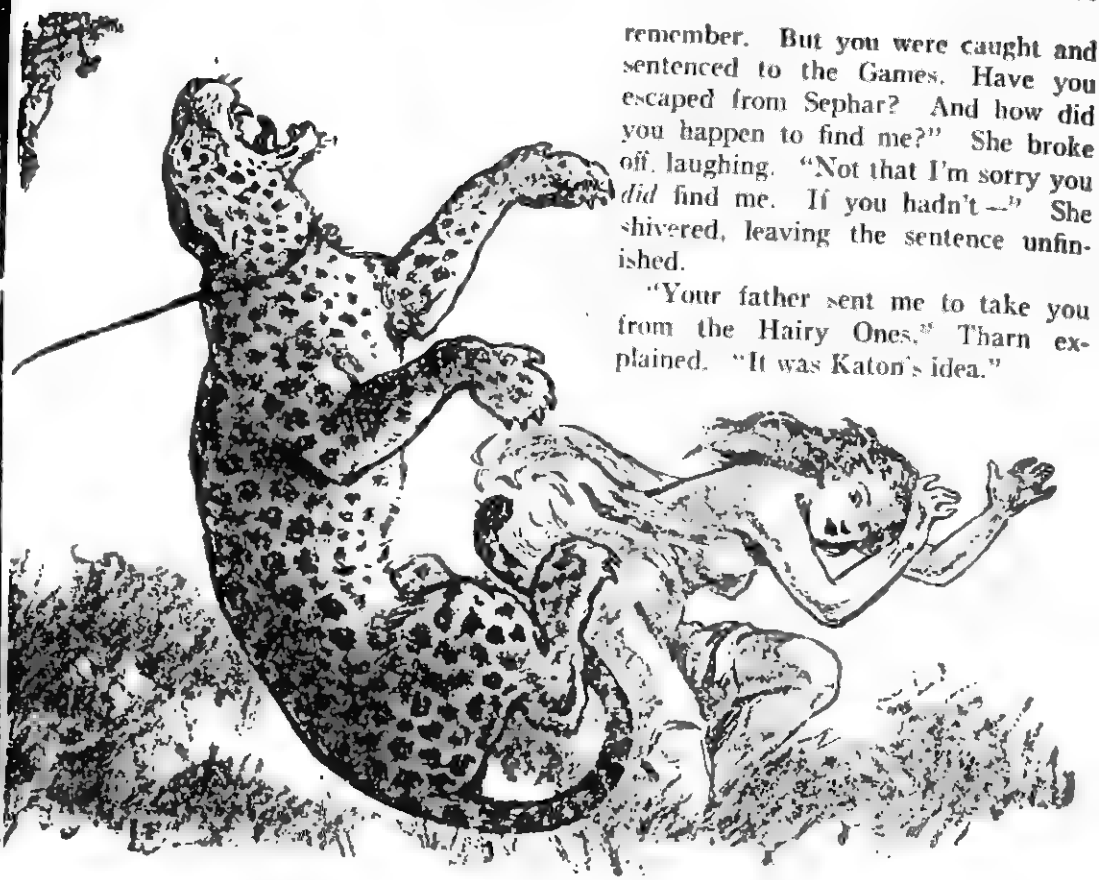
"Your father sent me to take you from the Hairy Ones," Tharn explained. "It was Katon's idea."

Whereupon he told of the agreement reached during his talk with Urim. The princess was secretly elated by one particular provision of the pact—the promised return of the Cro-Magnard girl to this man for succeeding in his mission. With Dylara gone, there was no reason why Jotan could not be won by Urim's daughter.

"Will you take me home, now?" she asked.

Tharn nodded. "We will go on until darkness, then sleep in the trees until morning."

He stood upright on the swaying bow, then bent and caught Alurna about the waist and swung her lightly to his back. The girl's arms slipped instinctively about the strong neck, and the young cave lord set off along the leafy avenue he had been following.



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THE first few minutes of the journey were never to be forgotten by the awed princess. Tharn's path took him high above the ground to where encumbering masses of tangled creepers did not reach. From one slender branch to another the majestic figure raced along with an easy sureness remarkable to behold.

Alurna forgot her fear of the heights, presently, admiration taking its place.

How confidently this god-like creature threaded his way across the network of bending boughs, where a slip might mean an awful death to them both! What splendid thews he possessed, to carry her as though she were a day-old babe!

Occasionally the rays of the sinking sun reached them through breaks in the foliage above, disclosing to the rapt eyes of the princess the horrid depths beneath.

Soon the dizzying bounds from one great tree pinnacle to the next ceased to be breath-taking, and Alurna rested against Tharn's warm shoulder, her nerves calm and relaxed.

Tharn's thoughts were far afield. Soon—another sun, in fact—Dylara and he would be on their way to the caves of Tharn. And Katon would go with them—Katon, his good friend.

The blue-eyed Sepharian and he would hunt in the forests with Barkoo and Korgul and Torbat. Katon would teach them to use the bow. Perhaps his friend would find a mate among the girls of the tribe. Then in truth would they be as blood-brothers!

How wonderful it would be to have such a companion! Always before he had spent much of his time alone, ranging the jungles for the adventures he craved. In all his tribe there had not been one he was drawn to; none he liked and respected enough to adopt as an intimate. Barkoo, of course, came closest to being such; but Barkoo carried far more years than he, and was given to the conservatism of old men.

The others were so far short of his own physical and mental stature. They could not race at breakneck speed through tree tops; they could not scent game from afar; they feared the great cats, unless in the company of many warriors.

It would be different, now. He would teach Katon the forest lore that had made Tharn master of the wild places. They would be always together—inseparable.

Only a few minutes of daylight remained when Tharn and his burden reached the forest's edge near the base of the sheer cliff between them and Sephar. Tharn realized they could not hope to complete the ascent before the light failed; so, selecting a tall tree, he fashioned a rude platform of branches high above the ground and covered it with leaves as a comfortable bed for the princess.

As for himself, he curled in a crotch of the same tree, a few feet beneath her, and, after waiting until she had ceased turning uneasily on her primitive couch, dropped off to sleep.

THE sun had barely cleared the eastern horizon when Alurna opened her eyes. For a long moment she gazed blankly at the ceiling of vegetation; then memory returned and she rose to her feet on the lattice of boughs that had served as her bed.

Something of the beauty of the untamed forest came to her as she stood there, drinking in the sea of green through sleep-freshened eyes. An early morning breeze stirred the vast expanse of leaves like an invisible hand; multi-colored birds flashed among the myriad branches and festooned vines, uttering strident cries,

or now and then surprising her with a burst of melody from some feathered throat. Already familiar were the ever-present troops of sure-footed monkeys, swinging and racing among the tree-top terraces—chattering, scolding, inquisitive.

This, she reflected, was the jungle—gaudy and sparkling and inviting on the surface; grim, and the lurking place of savage horror beneath its glamorous exterior.

There was a soft sound at her back, and she wheeled—to look into the quiet face of the cave-man. In his arms was a quantity of fruits; and Alurna was suddenly aware of being very hungry.

While they ate, seated on the bed of leaves, Alurna chattered continuously, asking many questions, seeking to explore the depths of her rescuer's mind and character. She found herself admiring the utter lack of self-consciousness in his replies and actions, while his habitual reserve and dignity of bearing compelled her respect.

Finally they descended to the ground and crossed the ribbon of grassland to the base of the lofty escarpment. Alurna, looking up at the upper rim so far above, shook her head in wonder.

"I'll never be able to climb it, Tharn," she protested. "How I ever managed to get down it without falling, is more than I know."

"We can not wish ourselves to the top," Tharn pointed out. "Nor is there any point in remaining here. We can at least make the effort."

It required more than an hour for them to gain the upper edge of the plateau. Alurna was helpless to aid him by doing any climbing herself; Tharn literally had to carry her up that vertical slope.

When they stood at last on level ground, the cave-man did not stop to rest. After they had crossed the narrow stretch of plains bordering the forest, Tharn turned to his companion.

"I am going to carry you, again," he said. "Hold me about the neck and do not be afraid."

WITH that, he lifted her easily, and supporting her thus with one arm, took to the trees. With the pathway through the branches lighted by Dyta's powerful rays, and with the knowledge that only a few hours remained before he would reclaim Dylara, Tharn elected to travel swiftly; and when the forest-man hurried, there were few of the jungle folk that could match his speed.

Onward he went, racing along swaying limbs, leaping outwárd across space to hurtle into the embrace of another tree at the dizzy height of the forest top, his free hand finding, unerringly, some waving bough at the very instant those sure feet came to rest on some strong branch. Now he threaded his way above the hard-packed earth with all the grace and agility of a tight-rope walker, prevented from falling only by an uncanny sense of balance. If handicapped by his burden, none might have guessed it; certainly he could not have moved with greater speed and surety had he been unencumbered.

Alurna lay quiescent within his grasp, looking up at the immobile face so near her own. It was restful to lie against the broad chest, her cheek pillowed on a firm shoulder, and be lulled to drowsiness by the rhythmic sway of this tireless body. A feeling of complete peace gradually suffused her entire being, her eyelids grew languorously heavy, closed of their own volition . . . Alurna fell fast asleep.

HOW long she slept Alurna never knew, but her eyes opened as she felt the arms about her relax their grip

and lower her to her feet. There was something almost of roughness in the action, and she looked up at Tharn quickly. To her surprise he was standing with head thrown back, nostrils twitching as he sniffed the wind from the north. His face seemed tense, strangely drawn.

She put a hand on his arm, her white fingers gleaming in sharp contrast to the tanned forearm.

"What has happened, Tharn?" She glanced uneasily about at the surrounding foliage. "Are we nearly to Sephar?"

Tharn was not listening. To his sensitive nostrils the wind was bringing the scent of a lion—and of a girl. The odors were commingled and of equal strength, sufficient evidence to Tharn that the girl might be in danger.

But the scents alone had not brought the tenseness to his face. There was a haunting familiarity to one of them—that of the girl.

And then he was galvanized into action. Whirling, he scooped up the girl and placed her on a thick branch, close to the bole.

"Remain here until I return," he commanded. "I will come back for you."

"But why—" began the princess, then realized she was addressing thin air. Tharn had g o n e, speeding through the trees into the north.

His mate was in danger! The thought echoed and re-echoed in his mind, even as logic told him it was next to impossible for Dylara to be elsewhere than in Urim's palace. Yet he would stake the evidence of his senses against reason itself—as, indeed, he was doing now.

If his passage through the trees with Alurna had been rapid, he was literally flying now—hurling himself from one branch to another with reckless fury—taking chances he ordinarily would never have considered.

While ever stronger to his nostrils came the scent of Sadu—and of Dylara.

At last he caught sight of her, seated on a fallen log at the edge of a trail, carefully massaging an ankle.

And at the same instant, from his elevated position, he caught sight of Sadu a few paces behind the unheeding daughter of Majok. The beast was lying belly-flat behind a curtain of vines; and even as Tharn discovered him the cat was preparing to spring.

The man of the caves never hesitated. Like a falling stone he plummeted earthward, dropping in front of Sadu as the beast rose in its spring.

DYLARA, aroused by crashing foliage, leaped to her feet and whirled about. She cried out awe-struck wonder as she saw the young man who had died beneath a Sepharian club standing between her and an on-rushing lion.

Powerless to move, she watched the Cro-Magnard crouch to meet certain death. In the single instant that elapsed before Sadu reached him, she saw Tharn's hands were empty.

And then her jaw dropped and her eyes flew wide with amazement. Tharn had leaped forward and sent his shoulder crashing into the side of the soaring brute. Sadu, caught off balance, spun sideways and fell heavily. He was up instantly, growling horribly, and in mad frenzy turned upon Tharn.

What Dylara witnessed then was something that was to go down in the folk lore of future generations of the Cro-Magnard people. She saw the clenched fingers of the man swing forward with every ounce of power in

that mighty arm, backed by the insane fury of utter desperation.

The iron fist struck Sadu full between the eyes, crushing the skull like a hollow melon and driving splinters of bone into that savage brain.

Dylara, weak with relief, felt her knees buckle as the lion sank lifeless to the ground. Tharn, his knuckles throbbing with pain, jumped forward and caught her about the waist. She turned her face to him, then, and he saw that her eyes were wet with tears.

Her warm red lips, slightly parted, were very near his own. Drawn by an irresistible impulse, Tharn bent his head to meet them. The girl saw the clean, firm mouth come close, yet she did not shrink away. Something was stirring deep within her — something that had never known life before this moment—something she had no time to analyze.

Suddenly she wanted more than anything else to feel that mouth pressed against her own. She lifted her face for Tharn's kiss. . . .

"Dylara!" said a quiet voice.

THE man and the girl sprang apart. Facing them, now, was a group of eight Sepharian warriors, a tall, broad-shouldered young man at their head.

Dylara knew the leader at once. It was Jotan. She saw that his expression was very stern, and she knew instinctively that he was thinking of her in Tharn's embrace.

Jotan ignored the cave-man. "We have been searching for you, Dylara," he said quietly. "Come, we shall return to Sephar at once."

Before she could frame a reply, Tharn had stepped in front of her. There followed a tense, electric moment of silence as the two men eyed each other.

"She is mine," Tharn said, without heat. "She goes with me."

Jotan gestured with one hand. In response, seven spears were leveled at the cave-man's naked chest.

"You are wrong, my friend," said the leader. "I am taking her with me. I have nothing against you; you may have your freedom if you go at once. Otherwise, you go back to Sephar as a prisoner. Resist, and my men will kill you."

Tharn was thinking rapidly. To attack eight armed men would be a fool's act. Alurna was waiting for him back there in the jungle. And in Alurna he had that which would put to naught those seven spears.

Let this man take Dylara back to Sephar. Tharn had only to return with the princess Alurna and claim his reward from Urim. That reward was—Dylara! He knew Urim would keep his word, no matter what objections were offered by this man.

"Well?" The word was clipped, cold, impatient.

Without a word Tharn turned and leaped into the branches overhead. He had not dared to offer Dylara an encouraging sign, fearing to arouse the Sepharian's suspicions.

The cave-girl watched him go, disbelief uppermost in her mind. It was not like Tharn to give up so easily. But did she want him not to give up? She had thrilled to his strength, his agility and fearlessness during the encounter with Sadu. No other man could have thus faced the jungle king with empty hands—and lived.

But were such qualities enough? She stole a glance at the handsome young Sepharian. In him was more than mere physical appeal. This man gave an impression of consideration and thoughtfulness. He would never take a girl against her will as Tharn had done. He was of a race that had

risen above cave life. His people had learned life could mean more than the hunt—more than sleeping and eating and talking. Would not living be richer, more full, with this man than it could possibly be with Tharn?

MEANWHILE, Tharn was speeding back through the trees to join Alurna. Led by his unerring sense of direction he soon entered the tree where he had left her.

She looked up with a relieved smile as he came into view. "I was beginning to think you had forgotten me," she said warmly. "Whatever possessed you to run away like that?"

Tharn had never liked giving long explanations. "It was nothing," he said lightly. "Let us go on."

They descended and walked slowly, side by side, along the trail. Alurna wondered why the cave-man no longer raced ahead as he had done before. But Tharn's purpose was clear in his mind: it would be best, he decided, to let Dylara and the Sepharians enter the city ahead of him.

Nearly two hours later they rounded a bend of the trail and came to a halt. Alurna gave a little cry of happiness. Directly ahead, beyond a brief expanse of open ground stood Sephar's walls. Turning to the silent figure at her side, she caught his arm and, like an eager child, sought to hurry him on.

Nor did Tharn need persuasion. He had stopped only because his ever-present sense of caution bade him go slowly. But the impelling hand at his arm removed the last lingering trace of reluctance.

They were half-way across the clearing before one of several warriors about a gateway spied them and raised a shout that brought a dozen guards from inside the walls. At sight of the cave-man and his companion the entire group came running toward them.

Once more Tharn stopped, hand dropping to the knife at his belt. But the impatient voice of the princess beat down his suspicion.

"No, Tharn, no! Those are my father's men. They come to welcome us."

His fingers relaxed their hold on the knife, but his hand remained close to its hilt. And then they were surrounded by the men of Sephar.

This detail was in charge of Lodorth, a tall, rather fleshy warrior of middle-age, very straight of back and given to the blunt speech of a soldier. Alurna remembered him as once having been stationed at the palace.

"Ah, princess," Lodorth said soberly. "We believed you to be dead or hopelessly lost. I am glad to be first in welcoming you."

Alurna was all smiles. "My father is worried, I know. I must go to him at once, Lodorth."

An expression which the girl could not define passed across the officer's face but he made no reply. Instead he turned to his men.

"Disarm this man and bind his hands!" he ordered, jerking a thumb toward Tharn.

Upon hearing this, the cave-man reached quickly for his knife, but froze as he felt several cold flint spearheads against the skin of his back.

"Disarm him!" barked the leader curtly.

One of the men stepped forward, and with a wary eye cocked toward the motionless figure, plucked the stone blade from Tharn's loin-cloth.

Then Alurna found her tongue.

"You are a fool, Lodorth!" she cried, turning on the captain. "This man saved my life. Give him his knife and

show him your respect, or you shall answer to Urim—and to me!"

Lodorth eyed her stolidly. "Pryak is king, now," he said, his face an impassive mask. "Urim is dead!"

CHAPTER XVII

Reunion

PRYAK, seated in one of the great rooms of the palace, was deep in conversation with Orbar, his lieutenant. The room, itself, was swarming with white-tunicked priests, their babbling voices adding to the atmosphere of confusion and disorder.

A knock sounded at the door and it was opened to admit three people. As they entered, a sudden hush fell over the milling throng of priests.

Pryak, aroused by the abrupt cessation of sound, looked up questioningly. At sight of the newcomers his eyes opened wide in surprise; then his lips curled in a smile more disturbing than the blackest frown.

"By the God!" he exclaimed, mock pleasure in his tone, "I welcome the daughter of Urim! I was told you were dead, princess—taken from us by the cruel jungle. And now you have come back! I shall enjoy hearing of your adventures."

The thinly veiled contempt in words and tone brought a wave of red across Alurna's pale, grief-stained face. Then she spoke—and her words, barely audible from the choking emotion behind them, carried such hatred and loathing as to hold Pryak petrified on his chair.

"Murderer!" she whispered. "Little man of filth! It was you who caused the death of my father! Who did it for you? How long do you think you can hold Urim's place before some *real* man takes your place—and twists your wrinkled neck?"

Pryak, his face livid with rage, leaped from his stool and lifted his hand to strike her into silence.

The blow never found its mark. Tharn, standing near Alurna, and forgotten by the others, had moved almost before Pryak was off the stool.

And so it was that Pryak, Voice of the Great God, found his bony wrist seized by fingers of steel and his swinging arm halted as abruptly as though it had encountered one of the room's stone walls.

Before the startled priest could cry out or his astounded followers interfere, he was snatched bodily from his feet and flung almost the entire length of the chamber.

Four priests were bowled over by the catapulting body; those human cushions were all that saved Pryak from injury.

Tharn went down, then, beneath a horde of fanatical priests. And before they had him bound and helpless, more than one felt the weight of his fists and the strength of his arms. At last they dragged him to his feet and stepped aside as Pryak, rumpled and bruised, came forward.

"For what you have done," he growled hoarsely, "you shall pay in blood and suffering. When the lions hunt you down in the arena during the Games, wild man, remember that you dared to lay hands on Sephar's king."

Tharn laughed in his face. "Better the fangs of Sadu," he gibed, "than the stench of a priest!"

STUNG by the taunt, Pryak went white. Unexpectedly, he lashed out with a bony fist, catching the young cave-man flush on the mouth. Tharn's expression did not change under the blow, but something crept into his eyes that made Pryak shrink back in alarm. Then, remembering the captive was

bound and helpless, he drew back his arm to strike again.

This time, however, a tall figure stood between him and Tharn—Lodorth, under-officer in Sephar's forces.

"You wish the prisoner taken to the pits, O Voice of the God?" The contempt in Lodorth's tone was poorly concealed.

For a moment Pryak considered ordering the man aside. He hesitated, then nodded assent and turned away.

"And the princess?" Lodorth called after him.

"Leave her here."

"This way," said the soldier to young Tharn, and together they moved toward the exit.

It was clear to Tharn that this warrior was no admirer of the treacherous high priest —a conclusion strengthened by the incident in which Lodorth had saved him from a second blow. He wondered if others in Sephar felt so toward their new ruler.

Presently they reached the entrance to the subterranean cell. Releasing the monstrous bar, Lodorth cut Tharn's bonds and motioned for him to enter.

Once within, Tharn's first thought was that he had been brought to another cell. Instead of the score or so of prisoners he had expected, there were fully a hundred men gathered here. Then he began to pick out familiar faces; and an instant later his doubts were dispelled as Katon came forward to welcome him, his blue eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Tharn!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I knew you would return. Did you find Alurna?"

"I found her," Tharn admitted ruefully. "But it would have been wiser to leave her at Sephar's gates."

Katon's smile faded. "You are right, my friend. Everything seems to work against us. You and I both have been hurt by this change. Had not Pryak gone completely mad, you and your mate would be starting for home by now, and Urim would have set me free.

"But all that may as well be forgotten, now. Soon the Games begin; our chief worry will be to save our skins."

THARN looked about at the many strange faces.

"It appears we shall have plenty of company," he observed.

"There are many others besides these," was the reply. "Pryak fears many of Urim's friends and intends using the Games to eliminate them. A room across the hall is filled with at least as many as you see here; and many of those men loved Urim and hate the one who caused his death.

"Pryak hopes to accomplish a double purpose this time. He will gain favor by offering the bloodiest Games ever held; also, he expects to wipe out all who oppose him by sending the opposition itself into the arena.

"I am told," Katon continued, "that many savage beasts are held ready to be sent against us. More than ever, Pryak is determined the final victor shall not be human. Were a man to prove the God's favorite, Sephar's populace might turn to him so strongly as to weaken Pryak's position."

Tharn grinned. "At least we shall have our fill of fighting."

"More than my fill!" retorted his friend, dryly.

Tharn, glancing about the crowded room, uttered a startled ejaculation and pointed toward a figure huddle near one of the walls.

"Who is that?" he asked. "Even with his face hidden in his hands, he seems known to me."

Katon grunted. "And well he should! That, my friend, is Vulcar—once captain of Urim's own guards!"

At Tharn's expression of shocked incredulity, he continued:

"He was brought here, yesterday, with nearly a score of warriors. In all the hours since, he has not spoken—only sits with bowed head. He, once so proud, is now humbled and beaten—crushed by the death of the man he worshipped."

Tharn studied the dejected figure. Courage might dull under such a blow as Vulcar had taken; yet it would still be courage. Experience told him a brave man is brave until death takes him; a coward, while occasionally rising above his weakness, remains a coward. And certainly Vulcar was known to be a man of courage.

From the moment of Tharn's recapture a plan had been taking form in his shrewd mind. He had never been one to accept resignedly what fate appeared to offer. If these other prisoners were ready to die in the arena, that was their affair; certainly he did not intend giving up so easily. Men like themselves had put them in this hole; and what one man could do, another could undo. The worst enemy of his fellows was their patient acceptance of what Pryak had decreed for them. If that viewpoint could only be reversed . . .

Taking Katon by the arm, he started across the room toward Vulcar.

"What are you—" Katon began, then subsided as the caveman frowned and shook his head in warning.

WHEN within a few paces of the former captain, Tharn stopped and turned his back, and Katon's, to the unheeding Vulcar.

"I tell you, it seems hard to believe," Tharn began, his voice raised somewhat above its usual pitch, "that none of Urim's friends has courage enough to avenge his death. Why, had I served under him, I—"

"Who says none hopes to avenge Urim?" The quiet words came from behind them.

Turning, they found Vulcar, head lifted and shoulders squared, regarding them fixedly.

The Cro-Magnard simulated surprise to hide his sudden elation. "If I am wrong—" He stopped there, waiting.

"What chance have we to avenge him?" Vulcar demanded, his hawk-like face drawn into lines of helpless fury. "Here we are—thrown into a hole, sentenced to die for the satisfaction of a false God—and to save Pryak from sleepless nights!"

Tharn appeared sympathetic. "Given a chance, however slight, would you take it?"

"Take it?" echoed Vulcar. "Of course! But there is no—"

"Are there others who feel as you?"

"I know of eighteen—those who went with me to search for Urim's daughter. When we returned to Sephar, Pryak's men overpowered us and brought us here. I am almost glad, now, that we did not find Alurna."

"Alurna is in Sephar," Tharn informed him. "I brought her back."

"You?" Vulcar came to his feet in surprise. "How did you get her?"

Briefly, the cave-man told of what had taken place. When he was done, Vulcar stepped forward and placed both hands on Tharn's shoulders.

"My life is yours for what you have done," he said simply. "No matter what happens to her as Pryak's captive, it cannot be so horrible as death in the jungle."

For a moment the three men were silent. Then Tharn said: "Let us sit here where we shall not be overheard. . . . Katon, what can you tell me of the Games?"

"What do you want to know about them?"

"Everything," Tharn said promptly. "How far are the pits from the arena itself? How many of us are sent into the arena at one time? How, and when, are we given weapons?"

Katon was eyeing him strangely. "Why do you want to know those things?"

"I will explain that after you have answered my questions."

THE conversation that followed was carried on in low voices. Katon did most of the talking; from time to time Vulcar added details. Tharn did little more than listen attentively.

At last the cave-man expressed satisfaction. "I think it can be done," he said slowly. "There is one weakness they have not covered."

"*What* can be done?" Plainly, Katon was puzzled. "What is behind all this, Tharn?"

Tharn leaned forward. "We want two things—and so does every man in this room and the room across the hall. First: freedom. Second: death to Pryak! Are you with me?"

Vulcar made a face. "Either one is beyond our reach. What can a few unarmed men do against all Sephar?"

"What have we to lose?" demanded the Cro-Magnard. "All of us are supposed to die within the arena. If we must accept death, why not do so while trying to escape?"

Katon and Vulcar exchanged glances. It was evident neither had thought of it just that way before.

"What," Vulcar said softly, "do you suggest?"

"To begin with," Tharn said, "it would be wise to have three or four more hear my plan. They in turn can pass the details on to the rest of the prisoners. Those across the hall must be included, and I have an idea how that can be arranged. We shall need every man we can get."

Vulcar said, "Let me pick the four."

Soon the former captain was back, his selections close at his heels. Tharn and Katon rose to meet them.

"These are good men," Vulcar said. "I know them all. They are ready to follow your lead.

"This one—" He indicated a short, squat man with heavy features and much coarse hair on chest, legs and head, "—is Brutan. He likes to fight."

Unexpectedly Brutan grinned. "Yes," he said in a deep, harsh voice, "I like to fight. I will fight anybody. I will fight you!"

Tharn grinned back at him. There was something likeable about this rock-like Sepharian.

"This," continued Vulcar, "is Rotark. He is not afraid to die."

Rotark was tall and very thin, with a long, sorrowful face. "Why should I be afraid?" he asked in lugubrious tones. "There is no pleasure in living. Soon we shall all be dead."

Next, Vulcar jerked a thumb toward a young, very handsome warrior whose tunic was amazingly clean and spotless in contrast to those of the others. His thick blond hair was neatly pushed back from a high, rounded forehead.

"He is Gorlat," said Vulcar. "He does not like to fight, but will do so to keep from being killed. Few men are his equal with a knife."

The blond young man smiled but said nothing.

"Brosan, here, you already know."

Tharn nodded. He remembered that pock-marked face, as well as the unconcerned grin exposing yellowed, broken teeth.

The cave-man came directly to the point.

"We are supposed to die in the arena

for the amusement of Pryak and the people of Sephar. To me, that seems wrong. It would be better if Pryak and his priests were the ones to die.

"I think that can be arranged. Listen, and when I am done, let me know what you think of my plan."

THEY listened closely and without interrupting. And while he awaited their reaction, they looked at one another in silence, while broad smiles began to steal across their faces. Even Rotark's lips twitched in approval.

"Good!" said Brutan the laconic.

"Even though we fail," said Rotark mournfully, "it is worth trying."

Gorlat said nothing, but his smile matched the brilliance of his hair. Katon and Vulcar regarded the cave-man with respect, deeply impressed with the plan he had offered. They realized the force of this barbarian's personality — that intangible requisite of all who would be leaders—had grasped the imagination of these men, winning their loyalty and unstinted support.

"When shall we tell the others?" Brosan asked.

"Go among them now," Tharn advised. "Explain our plan briefly, but cover every point. Warn them not to chance arousing suspicion among the guards. Everything depends upon absolute secrecy."

It was on the following day that the great Games began.

* * *

WHEN the door closed behind Tharn and Lodorth, a feeling of loneliness swept over the princess Alurna. She had come to regard the cave-man as her friend—perhaps the only friend left to her in all Sephar. She glanced fearfully at the face of the high-priest and found nothing there to reassure her.

Pryak's expression was stern; but that sternness was a mask to hide an inner perturbation. For there had come to him the realization that in this frail girl lay a vital threat to his newly won power.

He silently cursed his stupidity in receiving her so ungraciously, and silently he thanked his God that he had been prevented from actually striking the princess.

Alurna, he remembered, was more than Urim's daughter; she was niece to the most powerful figure of the known world—Jaltor, king of far-off Ammad, and commander of the greatest force of fighting-men ever assembled. Urim had been Jaltor's brother. . . .

Eventually, Jaltor would learn of his brother's death. As a statesman and ruler, he would understand that Urim's passing was incidental to a change in power and one of the hazards of kinghood.

It was not likely, however, that Jaltor would regard in a similar light an overt slight or actual cruelty to a niece. As a possible threat to Pryak's position as king, Alurna was not to be considered; only a man could rule men. For that reason alone, the high priest had no valid excuse to do her harm.

His course, then, was plain; every effort must be made to win this girl into regarding him as a friend, lest word reach Jaltor that his niece was a mistreated prisoner in Sephar.

The chill faded from Pryak's expression like snow under a hot sun. "I have been wrong, princess," he admitted, with passable humbleness. "As Urim's daughter, you are entitled to every respect and honor. From now on you may depend on being accorded both."

Alurna could hardly believe her ears. What had come over this old man, to change him so quickly and completely?

Her response was instant and characteristic. "I want nothing from you, priest!" she snapped.

Pryak lost his smile, but none of his urbanity. He beckoned to a nearby attendant. "Escort the princess to her rooms," he instructed. "See to it that her every wish is obeyed."

When Alurna had gone, a thoughtful Pryak dropped onto his stool across from Orbar and pursed his lips reflectively.

"There must be some way to dispose of her," he said, "without incurring the wrath of Jaltor."

Orbar grinned evilly. "A knife in the dark . . ." He let his voice trail off meaningly.

"You are a fool!" growled the new king. "Her uncle and his men would be at our gates within two moons. I dare not risk—"

He broke off as an under-priest came hurriedly from across the room and bowed before him.

"What is it, Baltor?"

"The three nobles of Ammad are here, asking that you see them."

Pryak sighed. Here were others he must treat with deference, lest his failure to do so cause international complications. He was beginning to understand that even an all-powerful monarch must recognize the importance of individuals other than himself. He felt vaguely distressed. . . .

"Bring them to me, here," he said.

A MOMENT later Jotan, Tamar and Javan approached the seated men and bent their heads in formal recognition.

"How may I, king of Sephar and Voice of the God, serve our noble visitors?" asked the arch-priest loftily.

Jotan acted as spokesman. "By granting us permission to set out for Ammad. Already have we delayed longer than was intended. To avoid the rainy season we should like to leave at once."

Pryak thought for a moment. He must not let them go so easily. They might think that he was relieved to be rid of them—that his hospitality was less than Urim's had been.

He said, "Would you start on so perilous a journey without first showing honor to your God? Tomorrow the Games begin. It would be wise to attend the first two days; otherwise misfortune may beset your path to Ammad."

Jotan was shrewd enough to yield. He guessed that Pryak was expecting to strengthen further his position as king by exhibiting the three Ammadians to the crowd as his intimates.

"Agreed," he responded. "I know that Jaltor, my king, will be greatly interested in an account of the lavishness of Sephar's Games."

It was then that Pryak found a solution to his problem!

Jotan, thinking the interview ended, had turned to go.

"Wait, Jotan of Ammad!"

The men from Ammad turned, surprised by the urgency in the high priest's voice. Pryak had risen and was coming toward them.

"There is something you can do for me, Jotan a small matter, but one that will relieve a rather delicate situation."

"Of course," Jotan said quickly.

"It concerns Alurna—Urim's daughter. She is not happy here. Since her father's . . . passing, she seems anxious to leave Sephar.

"It is my thought that she go with you to Ammad. Her uncle, Jaltor, would

welcome her, I am sure; and she would be content there. Will you take her with you?"

Jotan saw his chance! Ever since Dylara had been taken from him by Pryak's men a few hours before, Jotan had been at his wits' end for a way to get her back. The guards, learning she was an escaped slave, had taken her from the Ammadians as a matter of course; for, as a slave, she was the property of Sephar's king. Jotan had not demurred, partly because it would have been useless to argue the point with anyone lacking authority to make a decision, and partly because he was confident that Urim, when asked, would give the girl to him.

But upon learning of Urim's death, and of Pryak's seizure of power, Jotan's hopes began to fade. Pryak's reluctance toward granting favors, however trivial, was a matter of common gossip. This, coupled with the fact that the high priest might not be inclined to be overly cordial toward a close friend of the former ruler, decided Jotan against asking for the slave-girl — a decision strengthened by Tamar's logic during a discussion held shortly before the three friends had come to the palace.

Several times during the interview with Pryak, Jotan had been near to blurting out a request that Dylara be given to him. But his pride would not permit the risk of being coldly refused, and each time he had bitten back the words.

But now — now the picture was changed. Pryak had opened the way for a counter-proposal; one the priest could hardly refuse because of his own request.

JOTAN hid his elation behind an expressionless face. "I will gladly do as you have asked, Pryak of Ammad. Incidentally, there is a trifling favor you can grant me—if you will."

Tamar, listening, groaned inwardly.

"What is this favor?" asked the priest cautiously.

"I have become interested in one of the palace slave-girls," Jotan told him. "I should like to have her."

The modestness of the request confused Pryak. Somehow, such a petition seemed irrelevant, too petty.

"Of course," he agreed quickly. "I had expected that you would ask for something of more value. Take whichever slave you want—several, if you like."

"Your kindness indicates how generous a king rules Sephar," Jotan said smoothly. "If one of your men will accompany me, I shall give him the necessary instructions."

"Baltor, here, will carry out your orders." Pryak indicated the attendant who had ushered them in.

When they had left the room, Jotan said to the attendant:

"Go at once to the quarters of the female slaves. Instruct the guards there to turn over to you the slave-girl known as Dylara. You will bring her to my quarters."

"I understand, noble Jotan."

"When you have done this, return to the palace and seek out the princess, Alurna. Convey to her my greetings, and say that I wish an audience with her at her convenience. . . . Is all this clear to you?"

"Yes."

"Good! Report to me when you have finished."

CHAPTER XVIII

Death in a Bowl

DYTA, the sun, climbed his blue ladder and looked down at the

city of Sephar in its mountain fastness. Behind those gray stone walls hummed an activity found there only five days in every twelve moons.

For today was the first of the Game days. Since early morning the streets leading to the great amphitheater were packed with an eager citizenry, pushing and jostling its way toward the arena's several entrances. Those first to arrive had their choice of seats; consequently many had huddled beneath heavy cloaks outside the barred gates during the dark hours, awaiting the moment when they might enter.

It was a colorful throng, every member light-hearted, gay and friendly. Men and women pushed and tugged at their neighbors—friend and stranger alike—to keep the milling mass moving. Most of them carried parcels of food, for the Games lasted each day until the hour of sunset. Whole family groups were numerous: father, mother, and the brood of children. Many of the latter were mere infants, watching the swarm of shifting humanity with wide wondering eyes.

Patroling the avenues and directing the crowds at the gates were many priests in white tunics. This was to be their day, as well; for shortly before the Games got under way, elaborate rites, honoring the God, were to be held, in which every priest was to take part.

Truly, this was the day of days.

* * *

IN THE great cell beneath Sephar's streets, Tharn, Katon, Vulcar, Rotark, Brosan, Brutan and Gorlat squatted in a group about a huge earthen bowl of stewed meat. They, together with the balance of the prisoners, had been aroused from sleep an hour before sunrise, and had been given food that their strength and endurance might be equal to the tasks ahead.

Katon, seated across from Tharn, caught the Cro-Magnard's eye and nodded significantly.

"For a man who may be dead within a few hours," he said grimly, "you seem very cheerful."

Tharn grinned. "Would you have me seek out Pryak and beg for my life?"

The others laughed. Brutan put down a bone from which he had gnawed the meat, and belched with frank satisfaction. "I will show them how a real man fights!" he declared. "With my bare hands I once slew a leopard!"

Brosan made a derisive sound. "It must have been a very old leopard."

Brutan's complacent expression vanished. "You lie!" he bellowed, glaring belligerently at his heckler. "It was a great, full-grown—"

"Quiet, you fool!" snapped Katon. "This is no time to start a brawl."

Brutan mumbled something under his breath and went back to his bone.

Rotark wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "How many of us will see the end of this day?" he asked in doleful tones. "Take Gorlat, here—so careful not to soil his tunic. It may soak in his own blood before darkness comes again!"

The blond young man kept his mechanical smile. He said: "Not if they give me a knife. . . ."

Something in the soft words brought a momentary silence to the group. What had Vulcar said yesterday about this handsome, graceful youth? "Few men equal him in handling a knife. . . ."

Katon said, "It will be an hour before the Games actually get under way. First they must finish the rites honoring the God-Whose-Name - May-Not - Be-Spoken—a lenghty ritual. Then the guards will come, select a few of us, give them arms and send them into the arena."

"Somehow," Tharn said thoughtfully,

"I wonder if it is wise to wait until the third day before putting our plan into action. After three days many of our men will have died in the arena. We shall need every man we can get."

Katon rubbed his chin, frowning. "True," he admitted. "But to hurry this thing would be fatal. The guards must be satisfied that everything is going smoothly before they relax their watchfulness.

"Although we shall lose men," he continued, "I believe many of the soldiers and citizens of Sephar will join us when the revolt gets under way. Few, I imagine, regard Pryak with favor; they should welcome a chance to end his power and make one of their own men king."

Then and there the germ of an idea was implanted in Tharn's mind—an idea destined to bear fruit in the days ahead.

FOR THE better part of an hour the seven ring-leaders moved about the chamber, talking with groups of prisoners, discussing various phases of the plan Tharn had concocted. So confident did the seven seem, that many a despondent captive was caught up by their infectious spirit and began to grow impatient for the Games to start that the two days might pass the sooner.

At last the noise of sandaled feet sounded in the corridor, and a moment later the door was thrust open.

Five men came in: four well-armed priests wearing white tunics edged in black; and another, who was as different from the nondescript priests as Sadu differs from Botu, the jackal.

Head and shoulders above his companions towered this fifth man; his face was strong and proud, and from either side of a blade-like nose, eyes of blue fire swept over the crowded room.

Katon nudged the Cro-Magnard. "That tall one is Wotar, director of the Games. He is no priest; and before Urim died, was one of Sephar's most powerful nobles. He has been Game director for a long time; and since he seems still in charge, must be high in Pryak's favor."

Wotar may have heard the whispered words, for he glanced sharply in Katon's direction. The glittering eyes stopped at sight of Tharn, taking in the graceful contours and swelling thews beneath the clear bronzed skin.

"You," Wotar said quietly, crooking a long forefinger at the cave-man.

At first, Tharn did not fully comprehend; but when two of the priests laid hold of his arms, his doubt was gone.

"Goodbye, my friend." Katon's voice was sad. "We shall watch for your return."

"I will be back," Tharn promised from the doorway. Then he was gone, the great door crashing shut behind him.

THARN, preceded and followed by guards, was led along the corridor to where it ended before a narrow door. In response to Wotar's knock it opened, disclosing a small chamber almost filled with a miscellany of weapons of every type known to prehistoric man. An attendant stood in the center of the room, awaiting instructions from the director.

"No weapons," Wotar said briefly. He turned to the caveman. "You are to go directly to the arena's center and wait for whatever I send against you. Make a good fight of it and the crowd will be for you. That can mean much to you. If you manage to kill your opponent, return here at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Wotar nodded to the attendant and the arena door was opened, flooding the

room with sunshine. Tharn blinking in the sudden light, stepped out on to the white sands of Sephar's Colosseum.

That which met his eyes was something Tharn was never to forget. The sandy floor was perhaps three hundred feet in length and half as many in width —a perfectly symmetrical ellipse surrounded by a sheer stone wall twelve feet in height. Beyond that wall the spectator stands began, tier upon tier of stone benches sloping up and back for fifty yards to the last row.

The thousands of seats were filled with a shifting mass of humans, most of whom had risen as Tharn came into sight.

Never before had the cave-man seen so many people at one time; and the noise and confusion affected him exactly as it would any jungle denizen. His first instinctive impulse was to retreat, not because of fright, for he knew no fear, but because it was strange and unpleasant and, worst of all, there was that infernal din which only man of all animals can long endure.

The cave lord halted and half turned as though to withdraw, but the crowd, believing him to be afraid, set up an ear-splitting clamor of catcalls, whistlings and raucous shouts that whirled the barbarian about in sudden anger.

For a long moment he glared at the multi-eyed beast above him; then a slight sound at his back aroused him to his immediate surroundings.

He wheeled just as a huge figure launched itself at his neck. Before Tharn could prevent, strong fingers closed about his throat and the impact of a solid body sent him staggering, saved from falling only by superhuman effort.

DURING the seconds in which all this transpired, Tharn had discovered what it was that had leaped catlike upon him. He saw a great hulk of a man, naked except for a pelt about his loins; a man with muscles bulging so in arms, legs and shoulders as to constitute a deformity. He was not quite so tall as Tharn, with an ugly, hairy face, contorted with rage.

With the speed of a striking snake Tharn's hands came up, caught the wrists at his throat and tore away those choking fingers as though they were so many strands of cobweb. Then Tharn seized the other before he could twist free—caught him by thrusting an arm between the crotch of those gnarled legs while the other hand held to a hairy forearm. Lifting him thus, Tharn swung the man aloft like a bundle of grass, then flung him heavily to the sands a dozen paces away.

The onlookers came to their feet with a swelling roar of approval. This was what they had come to see; and they set up a deafening clamor that seemed to shake the stands. Tharn never heard them.

Now the dazed enemy was scrambling to his feet. Before he was fully erect, Tharn was upon him with the silent ferocity of Jalok, the panther. Grabbing the cringing man by the throat, the cave-man lifted him bodily from the sands, and holding him at forearm's length, shook him as a terrier shakes a rodent; shook him until the screaming voice was stilled as the senses fled and the white figure hung limp and motionless within Tharn's grasp.

Then, while the crowd watched in thrilled horror, Tharn dropped to one knee, placed the dead weight of his unconscious foe against his leg and snapped the man's spine as he might have broken a slender branch.

Rising, Tharn tossed aside the lifeless body and, not deigning to acknowledge by look or gestures the pandemonium of acclaim, disappeared through

the arms-room door.

* * *

ON THE same morning that the Sepharian Games had opened, a band of fifty warriors, clothed only in animal skins about their middles, halted on the outskirts of an impenetrable forest which towered across their path. At their backs was a broad prairie that had required many days to cross.

The leader of the group, a man of heroic proportions, called together three of the men and engaged them in earnest conversation. Several times he gestured toward the mouth of a game trail leading into the jungle; but the others continued to shake their heads as though unconvinced.

"He would not go that way," one of them was saying. "In that direction are high hills, and beyond those are great mountains he could not hope to pass."

"We do not know that he came even this far," said another of the three. "We lost his trail over two suns ago; he may have changed his path many times since then."

Their leader silenced them with a wave of his hand. "You have told me nothing to change my mind. The trail lies ahead; when we can go no farther will be time enough to turn back and seek in a new direction."

A few minutes later the last of the band had passed from view between the walls of vegetation lining the narrow path.

* * *

DYLARA, seated just behind the retaining wall of the arena, watched Tharn's broad back pass through the little doorway. About her was the murmur of many voices exclaiming over the exhibition of brute strength they had just witnessed. Dimly she heard Alurna telling of being rescued by that same forest god, the three nobles from Ammad serving as audience.

The cave-girl was trying hard to analyze the tangled emotions resulting from Tharn's appearance. Something related to the sensation she had known when he had taken her in his arms after striking Sadu dead, had come back to her. Why did sight of him make her heart leap with that peculiar breathless swoop? No one else she had ever known could effect it so. How handsome, how magnificent he had appeared, standing there on the white sands, sweeping the crowd with a contemptuous glance before leaving the arena.

She stole a glance at the handsome profile of Jotan as he listened politely to Alurna's story. How fortunate she was to have won the love of this man. In him were qualities all women sought in the men of their choice. Good-looking, kindly, thoughtful, an honorable position in his world—what more could any man offer?

Yet only Tharn, untamed man of the caves, could make her heart leap and thrill—something Jotan might never be able to do.

Last night a priest had come to the great room where she had been taken upon her return to Sephar. He had brought her to Jotan's quarters, and she had spent the night there, sharing a room with the princess Alurna, who had welcomed the opportunity of leaving the palace.

The two girls had little to say to each other. Alurna had regarded the slave-girl with unmasked loathing; while Dylara, after the first cold rebuff of her attempt to be friendly, had withdrawn into a shell of silence.

On the following morning, however, Alurna had surprised Dylara by displaying an attitude of warm friendliness

toward her. Behind this sudden change was the secret decision of the princess to undermine Jotan's attempts to win the slave-girl. . . .

Just as the second event was about to get under way, Jotan got up, excused himself and made his way to the section of the stands reserved for Pryak and the Council of Priests. There he took a seat beside the high priest.

Pryak glanced at him with a questioning lift of his eyebrows.

"O Voice of the God," said Jotan, "my men and I have kept our promise to attend the opening of the Games. We are anxious to start on our journey, and ask your permission to depart without further loss of time."

Sephar's enthusiastic reception of the Games thus far, had put the king in high humor.

"As you wish, Jotan," he said, rising and placing his hands on the other's shoulders. "I ask of the God a safe and uneventful journey for you and your men. And to Jaltor of Ammad, I send my greetings and avowals of lasting friendship. Explain to him my reasons for placing Urim's daughters in his care. He will approve, I am sure."

"All you have asked shall be done," promised Jotan. "And now, Pryak, king of Sephar and Voice of the God, I bid you farewell."

Turning, Jotan hurried along the stone aisle to his own lodge and waiting friends. Once there, he raised himself to his full height and waved both arms above his head.

DIRECTLY across the arena a group of some forty or fifty warriors rose in a body and started toward the nearest exit.

"Come," Jotan said, motioning to the balance of those in his party. "We start at once for Ammad."

Dylara stood up, casting one last look toward the closed doorway through which Tharn had passed not long before. He had been her last tie with the old life. Now she was about to leave all that behind, to go into a new world at the side of a man she greatly admired. Why was her heart so heavy? Was it because she would never again see the caves of her people—the face of her father? Or was it because Tharn was lost to her, forever? Even should he come through the Games alive, she would be gone—separated from him by the vast distance between Sephar and the country Jotan called home.

Jotan had told her something of the long stretches of untracked jungles and waterless plains between Sephar and Ammad. From others of the visitors she had heard stories of savage beasts and wild tribes of men that haunted the mountain trails and forest-cloaked ravines to the south. And beyond the mountains began a level monotony of grasslands that reached to still more mountains forming the boundary to Ammad itself.

The street before the building allocated to the visitors swarmed with hurrying figures bearing a wide assortment of articles to be bound into individual packs for easy handling.

Jotan took active charge. Quickly the line of march began to take form. Broad-shouldered men swung compact bundles to their backs; well-armed warriors took up their positions; and last of all, strongly made litters of animal skins stretched between long poles, arrived for use of the two female members of the party.

Dylara, following the example set by Alurna, seated herself in the exact center of the sheet of skins as it lay in the street. Two brawny attendants stepped forward, bent, one at either end of the wooden poles, and in perfect unison swung the rods to their shoulders.

From his position at the column's forefront, Jotan looked back and waved a greeting to the two girls. Satisfied that all were in place, he shouted a command and the safari got under way.

Across the city they marched, through wide-flung gates in the great walls, and on across the cleared space beyond. Before them rose the majestic trees and thick matted foliage of the forbidding jungle; and here, leading directly southward through a tangled maze, was the beginnings of a well-beaten trail, the first of many such roadways the little cortege must follow before far-off Ammad could be reached.

Just before the marchers entered the forest, Dylara turned to look back at Sephar's walls, grim and impressive under the sun's flaming rays. Still behind those sullen piles of rock was the man she could not forget. Something deep within her whispered that she had found love only to lose it; that happiness for her lay in forgetting, forever, the stalwart young giant who had snatched her from a peaceful, uneventful life.

Once more she looked back, and abruptly the stone walls wavered and dimmed as hot tears flooded her eyes . . .

CHAPTER XIX

A Lesson in Archery

DYTA, the sun, swung lazily toward the western horizon. And with the coming of dusk, Pryak rose from his bench at the edge of the arena in Sephar's amphitheater and gave the signal ending the first day of the Games.

At his gesture the spectators climbed to their feet and pressed toward the exits. They were less lively—more subdued than when they had poured into the enclosure hours before. Perhaps the constant association with death during the long day had sobered them, hushing their tongues at last. But on the morrow they would be back, yesterday's scenes forgotten, appetites whetted once more for hours of carnage.

While far beneath Sephar a roomful of tired unsmiling men spread their sleeping furs for the night in ominous silence. For them a long day had ended, yet taut nerves relaxed but slightly; for all knew that on the next day the wearying ordeal must begin anew.

Morning found most of the prisoners awake and moving about the cell when the morning meal was served. After the attendants had withdrawn and the crowds were beginning to stream into the amphitheater, Tharn called a number of prisoners together.

"Get ready," he said. "The guards are due here any minute. Listen at the door, Katon; when you hear them, let us know."

Turning, the cave-man pulled Vulcar into position as the central figure of the group. In this formation they waited expectantly, all eyes on Katon at the door with one ear glued to the crack between door and jamb.

Suddenly Katon straightened. "They come!" he whispered, and sprang forward to join the others.

At his words, the prisoners, yelling in well-simulated rage, pounced on the hawk-faced Vulcar. The one-time officer was swept from his feet and sent crashing to the floor with a resounding thump. A second later he was at the bottom of a pile of raving madmen, all clearly lusting for his blood.

It was this scene that met the eyes of four guards and Wotar as they came into the room. Taking in the situation at a glance, the director barked a curt order that sent the guards into the scuffle. Using spear butts as flails they managed to beat the cursing prisoners

from the limp body of a disheveled Vulcar, who got painfully to his feet.

"What means this?" Wotcar thundered. "Is there so little fighting in the arena that you must brawl amongst yourselves?"

Vulcar, still trembling from his narrow escape, hurried to explain.

"These men," he panted, indicating the scowling faces about him, "hate me because they think I am responsible for their being here. I have tried to tell them it was Urim's fault, that I had only obeyed his orders; but they would not listen. Some cried out that they would kill me; then all of them sprang upon me. I would be dead now, had you not come. As soon as you go they will try again. Put me elsewhere, mighty Wotar; I am afraid to stay here."

Vulcar's voice broke with fear, and he trembled so that he could hardly stand.

Wotar's lips curled with contempt. "Put him with the prisoners across the hall," he instructed one of the soldier-priests. "Perhaps they will be more gentle and considerate."

Wotar was an intelligent man; but he failed to notice that the departing prisoner no longer seemed the craven weakling of a moment before. Too, he failed to perceive the poorly hidden satisfaction of the other captives . . .

THE Game director, an experienced showman, had planned as the second day's opening event, something calculated to arouse the spectators to the highest pitch of excitement. Once in that frame of mind they would follow each succeeding event with increasing enthusiasm—enthusiasm being the barometer by which his fitness as director was measured.

Three times his finger crooked; each time a man stepped forward.

Quickly the guards took up positions and the three prisoners were led away.

In the arms-room each participant was handed a bow and three arrows. Wotar gave them instructions, the outer door was opened, and Katon, Rotark and Tharn stepped onto the sands.

From the stands came a full-throated roar of approval. Tharn's fabulous strength and agility they remembered from his initial appearance; the others they also recalled as being exceptional fighting-men.

This morning Tharn was feeling remarkably light-hearted. His supreme self-confidence gave him assurance his plan of escape would come off perfectly when the time was ripe. And certainly he was enjoying himself! These battles with men and with animals, with death the penalty for any mistake in tactics, were doing much to satisfy that deep love of adventure which was so great a part of him.

The men crossed the arena's entire length, halting a few feet from the eastern wall. Then they turned about and waited, watching silently the wooden door of the distant arms-room.

They had not long to wait. Scarcely had they turned when that door opened and three warriors, each with a bow and three arrows, came out. They were clothed in white tunics, with legs and feet bare. All were taller than the average Sepharian, with wide shoulders, narrow hips and slender well-formed legs.

"Sephar's three finest bowmen," Katon murmured. "The tallest is Maltor, at one time chief of archers under Jaltor, and probably the greatest man with a bow in our history.

"I had forgotten the report that he would fight in the arena. Since he enlisted in the Games only to display his bowmanship, he may withdraw at any time. Watch him constantly, for he is

our greatest danger."

He fell silent then, sudden lines of worry on his face. "Tharn, I remember, now, that you know nothing of fighting with a bow. We must work out some way of covering you."

THE CAVE-MAN permitted himself a grim smile. "You are wrong," he said quietly. "The bow and I are good friends. I will keep up my end of this fight."

Katon was satisfied. "Good. Now if only we can outwit them . . .

"Let them shoot first. Watch the fingers of their right hands; when they open on the arrow's haft, jump quickly aside, keeping an arrow ready in your own bow. The moment you regain balance aim quickly and send your first answer.

"Aim always for the belly. A man can shift his head and shoulders much quicker than he can his middle. Besides, his belly is a broader mark.

"Ready now! They are getting close! Tharn—Maltor is for you. Rotark—see what you can do with the man on his left. The other is mine.

"Ah! they have stopped. They still are too far away to risk a shot. Being careful, I suppose; they had better be!

"Tharn! Thrust two of your arrows point first in the sand within reach. Fit the other to your bow. Do the same, Rotark.

"Careful now! They are starting this way again! Maltor is no fool; he is trying to coax us into wasting arrows."

Katon fell silent. His two friends, their bows half drawn, arrow points held downward, stood relaxed, intently gauging the approach of the enemy, now a scant forty paces away.

An absolute silence had enveloped the entire amphitheater as every observer of this tense drama strained his eyes to catch the impending action.

Now Maltor, arrogant and impatient, stepped a pace or two in advance of his companions. Notching an arrow, he nodded over his shoulder to the others, who came up beside him. Three bows were raised in unison; the warriors aimed their shafts carefully, each at a different member of Katon's troupe. The human targets stood at ease, seemingly indifferent to their danger.

And then the scheme the wily Maltor had evolved was flashed on the enemy with a suddenness and brilliancy of execution that would have done much to settle the final outcome—had it succeeded.

A SPLIT second before the arrows were released, two of the three archers turned their aim toward the same target as that selected by Maltor. Immediately three bowstrings twanged as one, sending three flint-tipped shafts with incredible swiftness at a single mark.

To avoid one swiftly flying missile was difficult enough; to dodge three, so cunningly spaced that a move to either side would avail naught, was all but impossible. Yet in the flicker of time required for the arrows to reach him, Tharn had acted in the only manner possible to avoid impalement.

Flat on his face dropped the caveman, the three bolts passing inches above his descending head to shatter against the stone wall beyond. As he fell, Katon and Rotark fired their first arrows.

One found a mark. A man screamed suddenly, horribly, and sank to the sand, a wooden shaft protruding from his abdomen. Rotark had followed instructions!

Had Katon's target been less agile there would have been two casualties. But the man managed to avoid that flashing point by a sideward lunge,

keeping his balance with difficulty in the shifting sands.

Meanwhile, Tharn had not remained passively in a reclining position. As the opening barrage passed over him, he rose to his knees and dispatched his first arrow at the foe Katon had given him.

Maltor was too seasoned a warrior to be caught napping. Even though he had momentarily dismissed Tharn as a source of danger, he had kept an eye on the cave-man. And that precaution enabled him to twist aside barely in time to keep from being struck.

The veteran bowman gasped incredulously as the stone-shod missile whined past. He marvelled that a man's arm could be capable of driving an arrow with such superhuman power.

It was Maltor's last thought in this life.

Even as Tharn released his first arrow, his right hand shot out, snatched a second from its vertical position in the sand, strung it and let go—all within the quiver of an eye-lid. Maltor, still trying to regain balance, was in no position to dodge again.

THOSE in the stands saw the famed bowman straighten as though jerked upright by an invisible hand. Mouth agape, eyes staring in uncomprehending horror, he remained upright for a long moment, while a red line trickled between the fingers he had clapped to his side. Then he turned in a slow half-circle, his knees buckled; and Maltor sank to the sands, dead where he fell.

So savage had been the force behind Tharn's arrow that head and shaft had passed completely through the Sepharian's body.

Rotark, watching, spellbound by the brief drama, was shocked from his inertia when his bow was torn from his grasp and hurled several yards away. One end struck him, in its flight, full across the face and sent him sprawling.

An arrow intended for Rotark's heart had, instead, crashed against the hardwood bow in his hand. The impact cost Rotark two of his teeth; an inch or so either way would have cost him his life.

While the doleful one was still falling, Katon's bow spoke a second time and the last enemy dropped, mortally wounded.

Rotark, gloomier than ever, got unsteadily to his feet, spat out two teeth as an involuntary offering to the God-Whose - Name-May-Not - Be-Spoken-Aloud, picked up his splintered bow and started for the exit.

Katon and Tharn grinned quietly to one another and followed him.

And the thrilled thousands in the stands released at last the breath they unconsciously had been holding for long seconds.

AND SO the day wore on. Many times during the passing hours guards entered the great cell to select men for combat in the arena. Some of those selected returned, others never came back; but survivors outweighed, by far, the losses. The reasons were two: Every man knew that survival, now, would heighten his chance for freedom when the break took place. As a result he fought with determination and daring not possible without hope to feed upon.

Wotar was responsible for the second reason. The director knew from years of handling these Games that spectators thrilled more over duels between men than over those between men and beasts. As a consequence he husbanded his supply of warriors, sending enough of them at one time against the jungle creatures that the latter almost invariably succumbed before they could do

much harm. Only when a man proved an exceptionally able warrior were the odds more nearly even.

About mid-way in that long afternoon, Wotar and his men entered the dungeon and took Tharn, alone, with them. The cave lord looked back as he passed through the doorway, in time to catch an expression in Katon's eyes that was very close to being fear. It came to Tharn, then, that should he perish in action, the planned revolt might never take place. On his leadership depended the hopes of every man in that room.

Once more Tharn found himself in the arms-room. The attendant there looked questioningly at Wotar.

The master of the Games ran a thoughtful eye over the Cro-Magnard's splendid body.

"Give him a hunting-knife—and nothing else." he said finally. "So far this man has had an easy time of it. Now we shall learn just how much of a fighter he really is!"

Silently the guard presented a long-bladed knife of flint.

Once more the arena door opened; and Tharn, blade in hand, strode into the amphitheater.

The shrill cacophony which greeted him held a welcoming note that did not escape the young Tharn. For the first time, he raised his eyes to the innumerable tiers, observing with wonder the mammoth sea of faces turned in his direction. Near the arena wall on his right, and half way to the far end of the arena itself, was that section occupied by Pryak and his numerous retinue. Tharn had no difficulty in picking out the high priest's unimpressive figure seated close to the protecting wall.

The cave-man's reverie was abruptly shattered as the massive gate at the enclosure's far end began to swing open. For a moment nothing appeared; then slowly and majestically there emerged from the darkened interior Tharn's arch enemy—Sadu, the lion!

CHAPTER XX

Revolt!

AS SADU, the lion, came into full view, a collective groan rose on the afternoon air. Then came scattered boos and cries of disapproval from various points in the stands.

"Give him arrows and a bow!"

"No man can kill a lion with a knife!"

"Death to Pryak!" shouted some more hardy soul.

Scattered protests began to gather volume until they beat as a steady roar, filling the entire arena with ominous sound. Armed priests, stationed at the upper edge of the retaining wall, began to move uneasily among the seats to restore order.

Suddenly the mounting crescendo stilled, as action on the arena sands seemed imminent.

Sunlight, flooding the huge oval, bathed in golden glory the calm figure of the man and the tan coat of the jungle king. With striking clarity it picked out the corded muscles and swelling muscles of this cave-god. His handsome, finely-shaped head with its crowning mop of straight black hair; his shoulders, wide and erect; his mighty chest, narrow waist and tapering hips all made up a picture of physical perfection that no observer was likely to forget.

And yet, invincible though this Cro-Magnard appeared, he seemed puny and pitiable when compared with the huge beast that Wotar had sent against him. Never before had so magnificent a lion appeared in Sephar's Games. Even Tharn, jungle traveler for most

of his life, had blinked disbelievingly when Sadu made his entrance.

Sadu padded gently forward, the lithe sinews of his giant body rolling smoothly beneath a shimmering hide. He seemed unruffled and serene; only the angry lash of his sinuous tail told of a seething ferocity within that lordly head.

Armed only with his painfully inadequate knife, Tharn advanced slowly to meet certain destruction. He knew his chances for victory were so slim as to be almost non-exisent; yet the self-confidence and resourcefulness born of a hundred battles against overwhelming odds were weapons more dependable than the flint blade he carried.

Sadu stopped his own advance when the hated man-thing started toward him. For several days now, he had been underfed, goaded about with sharp sticks and shouting voices, harassed and annoyed until he was angry enough to have charged a regiment. Yet that unfathomable sense of caution, so strong a part of every wild creature, held him motionless before the deliberate approach of this two-legged enemy.

Tharn halted. Only a few paces separated the two as they stood unmoving. The man's eyes were riveted on the lion's restless tail; by its movements could he know what was taking place in Sadu's brain.

Slowly Sadu settled into a crouching position, head flattened, hindquarters drawn beneath his taut frame, tail twitching in jerky undulations. A vagrant breeze ruffled the thick mane at his neck . . .

SUDDENLY the tail stiffened and shot erect; and voicing an ear-shattering roar, Sadu sprang at the man in his path.

Sadu, the lion, had felt man's tender flesh beneath his yellow fangs and murderous talons before this. He expected no more resistance from this one than had come from those others.

It was an astonished beast, therefore, that crashed to the sand where the man had been—and was no longer. With an uncanny agility Tharn evaded that lightning charge; then, so quickly that human eyes were hard put to follow, he leaped in and drove his heavy knife deep behind Sadu's left shoulder.

The jungle king, snarling hideously from unexpected pain and shock, wheeled and struck in one simultaneous motion; but Tharn, leaping high as the great cat turned, vaulted completely over the broad back, the dripping knife still clutched in his hand. Before Sadu could reverse himself, the blade flashed again, striking at the base of the tawny neck where lay the great spine.

The flint bit deep but missed a vital spot by half an inch. Sadu had moved in a rapid sideward maneuver as Tharn's arm was descending, and while the wound that resulted was painful, it was by no means fatal.

Worst of all, the blow had cost the Cro-Magnard his only weapon. Sadu's sudden shift had torn the knife from Tharn's fingers before he could tug it free, leaving the blade sunk deep, haft still standing upright like a miniature cross.

His blood crimsoning the white sands, Sadu whirled about, sending a shower of the fine particles high into the air. Once more he hurled himself at his elusive foe, and once more Tharn dodged aside. But this time his foot slipped a little in the yielding sand. One flailing paw struck his chest a glancing blow, the claws raking long scratches there, and Tharn was catapulted heels over head a full fifteen feet across the arena.

A little murmur of protest came from the ranks of spectators. They had wit-

nessed what had promised to be an ineffectual struggle develop into a battle between giants, with its ultimate outcome very much in doubt. Now, through a quirk of fate, the grim battle was ended; the favorite they had acclaimed was doomed.

Sadu leaped forward to make his kill.

Tharn, helpless, knew life had run its course. Nothing could save him now.

And then fickle fate shifted once more. Tharn's right hand, pressing against the ground in a last futile effort to throw himself to one side, closed purely by chance about a hard object which he instantly identified as the hilt of a stone knife, dropped there, doubtless, by some warrior earlier in the day.

Recognition and action came together. Tharn raised the weapon, hilt between thumb and bent forefinger, and, while still in a sitting position, flung it with all the concentrated strength of his powerful arm point foremost at the onrushing bulk.

As in a dream he saw the sliver of flint streak through the sunlight to meet the great head. Full into Sadu's right eye sank its entire length; then a crushing weight came down on Tharn's chest and he knew no more.

HE could not have been unconscious for long; for his eyes opened in time to see Sadu's lifeless body being dragged away. Two guards were standing over his own supine figure, evidently seeking to learn the extent of his injuries.

"He lives!" ejaculated one in surprise, as Tharn's eyes fluttered open.

In answer the cave man got unsteadily to his feet, and while the effort sent a spasm of pain through his bruised chest and aching ribs, his face betrayed nothing of his suffering.

Leisurely he brushed sand from his back and legs, then turned and walked toward the western gate. Heedless to the thunder of acclaim beating against his ears, he disappeared through the arms-room door.

Once within the common cell, Tharn told enough of his adventure to dull the prisoners' curiosity, then edged away to join Katon.

Thus the day wore on. Now and then guards would enter, pick out a man or two and depart. Once, Brutan came back from the arena with his left cheek laid open from an animal's claw. But the wound had dulled no part of his braggardism and he told a highly colored tale of an encounter against nearly impossible odds.

Later in that afternoon, Katon had been summoned, to be absent for what seemed an age to Tharn. But return he did, unscathed, a broad smile lighting up his face as the cave lord came forward to welcome him.

A bond of friendship, based on mutual respect and admiration, had formed between these two men; a bond which passing days but served to augment. It was destined to be that rare understanding known only between men, wherein each finds within the other something of himself.

Just before the day's end, Brosan went out, a quip on his lips and a careless wave of his hand to the others. That joking remark and carefree gesture remained with every man in the cell, for Brosan never came back . . .

Darkness came at last, and for a second time the roaring of beasts and shrieks and moans of dying men ceased in the oval above. Food was brought and the weary gladiators ate and drank, doing their best to forget tiredness and strain.

Sleep came slowly that night to most of them. Within every heart was strong desire for the morrow to come—the

new day for which all had waited. There were some here who would never see a second sunrise; but, as is usual under such conditions, each man looked for death to single out any one other than himself.

* * *

LESS than a day's journey to the north of Sephar's walls a party of fifty warriors supped on the freshly-killed meat of Neela, the zebra, shortly before Dyta slid below the western earth-line. All that day they had traveled slowly along a thread-like game trail leading directly south. At times, for hours on end, they had walked through sombre depths of brooding jungle, beneath grotesque shadows of forest kings. Again, their way was across wide reaches of gently undulating prairie, where thick yellow grasses, deep to a tall man's thighs, stirred beneath the touch of baking winds.

Always, however, they had moved into the south, and ever in the lead was he whose decision, based solely on a vague premonition, had brought them so far from home. On this man's left forearm was the painted insignia of a chief . . .

With the sudden coming of night, the entire party took to the safety of high branches on either side of the trail. When Dyta returned on the morrow, they once more would take up their march into the mountains to the south . . . always to the south.

* * *

ONCE more, dawn poked gray fingers through the overhead grillwork of the great cell beneath Sephar's amphitheater. And from the same point came sounds of Sephar's thousands, filing again into their seats for another day of grisly entertainment.

Tharn rolled over, sat up and ran tanned fingers through his heavy shock of black hair. For a moment his eyes ran over the sleeping scores, picking out many whom he had learned to respect. There was Katon, head pillowed on the biceps of a strong right arm, a half smile discernible on his firm mouth; he was sleeping soundly. Near him lay Brutan, the red edges of his wound showing through black stubble covering his cheek. There was Rotark, his long face even more solemn in sleep; and next to him, Gorlat, blond hair unruffled, his tunic, still nearly immaculate, neatly folded and placed close beside him.

Tharn got to his feet and set about awakening the sleepers. Before Wotar arrived, he meant to speak once more to the prisoners; to go over for the last time, those few vital points which all must know perfectly if his plans were to be carried to a successful conclusion.

When all were assembled, he spoke briefly, asking questions again and again that none might fail to understand what was expected of him. The men listened intently, hanging on his every word and drinking deep of the inexhaustible fund of courage and surety possessed by the gray-eyed young man.

When he had finished he knew they were with him heart and soul, that every man present would charge, without hesitation, a hundred spear points if the need arose. If Vulcar could manage as well with the group across the hall, then Sephar could have a new ruler before nightfall.

He had no more than finished speaking, when the door opened, admitting Wotar and six guards. Quickly, ten prisoners were singled out and taken from the cell, among them Tharn and the golden haired Gorlat.

Upon reaching the arms-room, Wotar sent four prisoners, with as many guards, into the chamber, the others being forced to wait until the tiny room

could be cleared. And of the four who entered, two were Tharn and Gorlat.

The door was closed and barred. The prisoners stood quietly, waiting for the attendant to parcel out weapons to them.

The crisis was at hand. Now that it had come, Tharn felt his muscles tense, his nerves grow taut, a deadly coolness steal through him. His eyes narrowed, as do the eyes of Tarlok preparing to leap upon unwary prey.

The air of the small chamber seemed suddenly charged with something electrical; a hushed breath of expectancy made the stillness strangely unbearable. . . .

A GUARD cleared his throat uneasily, sending a harsh rasping note against the silence. He said, "Give each man a bow, ten arrows and a spear."

Removing a stone-tipped spear from a pile in one corner, the attendant offered it, butt foremost, to the cave-man, who reached forth a steady hand to take it. As his fingers closed on the haft, and before anyone could guess his intention, Tharn drew back his arm and drove the triangle of flint into the man's throat, changing a scream of terror into a gasping whisper.

As the dying guard slumped forward, the other captives snatched weapons from the supply about them and leaped upon the dazed soldiers, three of whom went down before they could lift a hand in defense.

Tharn, farthest from the group, was forced to cross the entire room before he could lay hands on the fourth guard. That one, instead of standing his ground, was seeking to reach and unbar the corridor door.

As he fumbled with the heavy timber, iron fingers closed on one shoulder and tore him away. Up and back he swung, high above Tharn's head; then his thrown body struck head foremost against the far wall, crushing the skull like a blown egg.

Turning to his comrades, Tharn found two of the three remaining guards were already accounted for. The third, however, had killed one rebel, and using the dead body as a shield, was successfully standing off all efforts of the two men seeking to reach him. In one hand he grasped a long spear, its darting head having already inflicted slight wounds on the meacing pair.

A thunderous pounding warned Tharn that the sounds of combat had aroused Wotar and his two men. The entire rebellion was being threatened by one courageous man; and unless this delay was speedily ended, the break for freedom was destined to end here and now.

Stooping, Tharn grasped the dead body of the attendant, straightened, and hurled it with all his giant strength full against the lone defender's human shield. So terrific was that impact, that the guard was swept completely from his feet. Before he could recover, Gorlat had slipped a knife into his heart.

Bounding forward, Tharn unbarred and threw open the door, and sprang into the corridor, his two friends at his heels. He had a brief glimpse of Wotar's hanging jaw and stupefied expression before the two factions closed in battle.

WOTAR was no coward. As Tharn leaped toward him he whipped a knife from his belt and swung it savagely at the Cro-Magnard's broad chest.

Like the striking head of an angry snake, Tharn's hand shot out and closed on Wotar's wrist. Mighty fingers contracted, and the knife dropped from his nerveless grasp to clatter against the stone floor. Tharn's free hand closed

on the hapless leader's jaw, tightened, then wrenched the head in a vicious half-circle that left a broken neck in its wake.

When Tharn released the clay that once had been Wotar, master of Sephar's Games, he found no other foe alive within the corridor. Dead on the floor were the two guards, torn and mangled from the savage fury of those who had snuffed out their lives. Eight men, eyes alight, stood before him, awaiting instructions.

The cave dweller singled out two of them.

"Go back and open both cells. First, free those in our own room; Vulcar may not have convinced the others to join us. If so, our men can help in convincing them!

"Tell them the way is open to this room. Caution all to silence, that none overhears us and warns those we hope to surprise."

Tharn then motioned the remaining six into the arms-room. There, each armed himself with a bow, arrows, knife and a spear.

Soon they heard sounds of naked feet within the corridor, and into view, three abreast, came the former prisoners. At their head was Katon; beside him strode Vulcar, once captain of Urim's guards.

Tharn halted them just short of the arsenal. He ran his eyes along the ranks, and what he saw brought a smile of satisfaction to his lips.

As far back as his eyes could make out in the dimly lighted passageway were men. There were at least a hundred and fifty—perhaps more; all eager for weapons and a chance to use them.

The Cro-Magnard held up one hand to gain their attention. "Remember," he said, "march into the arena quickly and in silence. Do not so much as glance at the spectators until I give the signal. And when that signal comes, seek to kill only priests and warriors. To attack the people of Sephar without cause would only make them hate and fear us. We cannot fight an entire city.

"Come forward now—three each time. Once within the arena, take the places I give you."

Three entered the arms-room. To each went a bow, quiver of arrows, complete with shoulder band; a knife and a spear. Tharn then opened the outer door and passed them through, then pulled it shut and aided in arming the next three.

In that fashion twenty-seven were sent into the amphitheater before Tharn called a halt. Dimly, he could hear the rustling murmur from the packed stands, and he knew that all was well —thus far, at least.

He summoned Vulcar and Katon, now, gave them weapons identical to those issued to the others, and went with them into the arena, Rotark acting as door-keeper.

IN A wide semi-circle at the far end of the sandy field stood the twenty-seven who had gone before them. They made a thin line, their backs close to the retaining wall, one end of which was almost directly below the loges occupied by Pryak and the Council of Priests. It was toward this section that Tharn and his two companons bent their steps.

The cave lord took a position less than four paces from the stone barrier at his back. Above him sat Pryak, high priest and ruler of Sephar, deep in conversation with Orbar.

Now, the second contingent of warriors began to issue from the arms-room. In groups of three, seconds apart, they emerged and took up positions near the wall at the arena's opposite end.

When an equal number were at either

end of the enclosure, the influx of armed men became heavier. In groups of five, now, they appeared and formed a second row a few feet in front of the others and facing in the same direction. There were fully four score in the open by this time—and still they came.

Tharn knew the moment was fast approaching when suspicion would become aroused by this unprecedented concentration of warriors. Already a few priests were peering down at them, puzzled expressions on their faces. The buzz of conversation began to fade; and here and there spectators were rising to their feet.

Pryak stood up, suddenly, and leaned over the railing.

"What means this?" he asked of Orbar. "Does Wotar mean to end the Games with one battle? There are too many men on the sands; send someone to investigate."

Tharn, overhearing, knew he dared wait no longer. Throwing back his head, he sent the hair-raising battle cry of his tribe reverberating throughout the entire structure. As the notes of that horrendous cry rose on the still air, he pivoted about and sent a slender arrow leaping from his bow full at the head of Pryak, king of Sephar!

It is no mean tribute to Pryak's nimbleness to tell that he dodged that arrow. And dodge it he did—falling back into the arms of his retinue as death passed a finger's breadth above his sparse locks to transfix an unfortunate under-priest.

The cave-man's cry was the awaited signal, releasing all the pent-up hate and fury within the hearts of those who acknowledged him as leader. As one man, a hundred warriors turned and loosed a shower of arrows at the thin line of guards and priests above them. The instant those flint-tipped messengers were released, those rebels nearest the walls knelt, braced themselves and became living ladders over which their comrades swarmed to gain the seats above.

A LIVING wave of blood-hungry men swarmed into the stands and fell upon the already wavering ranks of defenders. The entire bowl was now a maelstrom of swirling bodies, legs and arms. Panic-stricken spectators, few of them armed, rose from their benches and rushed headlong for the exits, trammeling, pushing, fighting to gain the streets, to escape the raving horde of crazed demons.

And, seemingly everywhere at the same time, Tharn, Katon and Vulcar fought shoulder to shoulder, their knives rising and falling, their spears licking out to take lives and spread further the reign of terror they had fostered.

Twice, Tharn caught sight of Gorlat, blond hair finally disarranged, weaving among the tiers like a cat, his only weapon a long, thin knife. And as priest after priest sought futilely to keep that long blade from his throat, Tharn knew, now, why Vulcar had said few could equal that young man with such a weapon. How many died that day with throats slit by that knife, only Gorlat knew—and he was never to tell.

It had happened shortly after Tharn had caught his second glimpse of the steadily smiling youth. Gorlat had just made a kill, and as he stood erect, a thrown spear came from nowhere to catch him full in the chest. Gorlat had staggered back to sink into a sitting position on an empty bench. Dazedly he had raised a hand to wipe away the red stains of his own blood from that once spotless tunic—then slumped back and moved no more.

There were other men of Tharn's force who fell, never to rise again; but

for each who died, five enemies went to join him. Bodies of slain priests were everywhere—draped across seats, hanging over the arena wall, lying in the aisles. Warriors loyal to Pryak had died in droves and lay glaring at the sky with sightless eyes.

At last there was none within the amphitheater other than the dead, the wounded, and the blood-splashed figures of the rebels who stood panting from their efforts, their eyes on Tharn and his two lieutenants.

Of those three, Vulcar alone had been wounded. An arrow had creased his shoulder close to his neck, and blood from the cut had stained one side of his chest a fast-darkening crimson. But his eyes mere bright with satisfaction and his lips were curled in grim content.

"Urim would have enjoyed this!" he said, and his smile widened. "Now, on to the palace and the temple to clean out the rest of Pryak's men. That done, the city is ours!"

Katon bent and took up a stray spear. "Come, then," he remarked; "if we wait, they will have gotten over their panic and will be that much harder to rout a second time."

Tharn nodded agreement. "First, the palace; then we can invade the temple and take Pryak and his men."

A WARRIOR spoke from the ranks. "Dare we enter the temple?" he asked doubtfully. "If we offend the God, He may destroy us."

"He is right!" declared another. "Why should we chance angering our God. Once the city is ours, Pryak will have to do as we say. Let us not attack the House of the God."

"Pryak dies!" Vulcar roared, grinding the butt of his spear savagely against the stone flooring. "Let the God be offended—Pryak must die! If the rest of you brave warriors are afraid, I will go alone into the temple and drag out Urim's murderer by the few hairs left on his ugly head!

"Did Pryak's God save these priests who lie about us, here, their bodies cut by our spears and knives? Did He, seeing Pryak in danger, hide him with His sky-fire? No; they were men like us; and since they deserved to die, they *did* die! Pryak is next!"

Tharn, listening with silent admiration and approval, thought of something that snatched the half-smile from his lips.

"Where *is* Pryak?" he asked. "He was here when the fighting started. How did he and those with him get away?"

The others could furnish nothing toward clearing up this minor mystery. Nor was there a single body of the missing group in the vicinity.

"Let us go on," suggested Tharn finally. "After the palace is taken, we can set about finding Vulcar's good friend Pryak!"

Still chuckling at the cave-man's sally, the insurgents formed into a column, three abreast, and marched toward a nearby exit that led from the shambles they had created.

CHAPTER XXI

Conclusion

UPON reaching the street, they started for the palace, its white walls gleaming under the mid-morning sun. No citizen of Sephar was abroad; but the marching men were conscious of watching eyes at windows of the buildings on either side.

The palace grounds, too, were deserted as they swept across the palace grounds and dashed against the great double doors. They might as well have sought to force the palace walls so strongly barred were the heavy planks.

As they stood debating their next step, a shower of spears, arrows and clubs fell suddenly upon them from above, killing several before Tharn could give the order to withdraw.

At a safe distance from the windows, Tharn, Vulcar and Katon held a brief council of war, finally agreeing upon a strategic maneuver that held promise of being effective.

Eight warriors left the group, returning with a heavy log, free of branches. This was carried, four men to a side, to within a short distance from the barred entranceway. Now, eight replacements came forward, took up the massive tree trunk and started at a run toward the doors, the log's heavy base aimed at a point where the two rough-hewn sections joined.

Within a dozen paces of their objective, they swerved sharply to their left and sent the great timber crashing through the slender stone columns of a large window.

Following the log came those who had carried it, pouring through to the hallway beyond. It was deserted; evidently the defenders were grouped at the upstairs windows, intending to stage their defense from that point.

A second later the palace doors were thrown wide and, notwithstanding a heavy barrage from overhead, the rebels soon over-ran the central hallway.

Halfway up the wide staircase they were met by a withering volley from the upper passageway and stairhead. But Tharn raised his voice once more in the awesome war challenge of his people, and which seemed to lift his followers bodily to the top of the steps.

Here, fighting was fast and furious. Although outnumbered at first by four to one, the insurgents made up that handicap by the intensity of their assault; and slowly but steadily Pryak's loyal troops were being pushed back.

THARN was in his element! Knife and spear had been cast aside or lost; his only weapons were his mighty hands. Yet his was the most feared figure among the rebels, as was attested to by the mound of strangled and broken guards strewn about him.

Several times he saw Katon battling away close by, a long knife in either hand. Once, an enemy in a badly torn tunic was preparing to drive a knife into his unsuspecting back! Tharn had torn a spear from the fingers of a neighboring comrade and without pausing to judge distance, had thrown it across the hall to pass half its length into the side of Katon's would-be slayer. The man had fallen, while Katon, unaware of his narrow escape, was finishing the warrior with whom he had been engaged.

Of Vulcar, Brutan and Rotark, Tharn had seen nothing since the battle began. During momentary lulls he had time to wonder how they were faring—if, somewhere in this madhouse of fighting, bellowing men, they were managing to keep their skins whole.

Gradually the palace defenders were weakening, losing heart as their list of casualties grew. Already, the men of Tharn's party had sensed victory was slowly but surely passing into their hands.

And then came the unexpected, the one contingency which none of the rebel leaders had forseen.

A ringing shout sounded from the open doorway, and through the gap come priests from the temple of Sephar's God. Instead of waiting for the freedom-hungry prisoners to take their first objective, then march against the House of God, the cunning arch priest had sent every man he could muster to reinforce the palace garrison.

There must have been a hundred of them, fresh and—for priests—eager for battle. They fell upon the revolters

from behind, spreading death and consternation in the thinning ranks of those from Sephar's pits.

Encouraged by aid from this wholly unexpected quarter, the palace defenders regained their fading morale and renewed the attack with reckless fury.

The end had come. Bitter was the realization to Tharn who, until now, had been certain nothing could prevent his men from taking Sephar. He smarted under the knowledge that wily old Pryak had outwitted them after all.

He might, under cover of the raging turmoil, have turned his back on friends and supporters to seek out Dylara's cell and escape with her from Sephar. But the thought was gone as it was born; and the Cro-Magnard sought to rally his shaken followers to the task of cutting a pathway back to the street. Once outside, some of them might manage to flee into the jungle—a far cry from their ambitious dream of taking Sephar!

It began to appear, however, that leaving the palace was to be infinitely more difficult than forcing an entrance had been. Again and again his men were repulsed by the white-faced but unflinching priests at the foot of the staircase. Steadily the number of rebels grew less; and while they took more lives than they gave, there were too many to outlast.

Suddenly there rose above the pandemonium within, a chorus of savage cries from outside the open doors. Tharn straightened as though struck by an unseen spear. His eyes went wide with incredulous astonishment bordering on disbelief; then from his powerful lungs broke an answering shout that paled to insignificance the tumult about him.

SWARMING into the hall below, came a host of strange, warlike fighting-men, naked except for panther- and leopard-skins about their loins. Splendid, beautifully proportioned barbarians they were, heavy war-spears gripped in powerful right hands, sun-bronzed skins rippling under the play of corded muscles.

At their head was the stalwart figure of a man such as never before had been seen within Sephar's borders. Four inches above six feet he stood, slim of hip and broad of shoulder—a wealth of black hair held from his eyes by a strip of cured snakeskin.

"Father!" burst from Tharn's lips.

At sound of his cry, the leader of the newcomers looked sharply in his direction.

"Kill!" shouted young Tharn, bringing one hand out in a sweeping gesture toward the frozen ranks of priests.

In response, the Cro-Magnards threw themselves at the white-clad enemy. At the same time Tharn, the younger, leaped into action, shouting words of instruction and encouragement to his friends.

The end came quickly. Torn at from two sides, the priests broke and fled in all directions, the cave-men in hot pursuit. At sight of this, the original defenders threw down their weapons and surrendered on the spot.

Now came Tharn, the elder, striding forward to greet his son. Behind him crowded others of the tribe, wide smiles on their lips.

"We have searched long for you, my son," said the chief. "At times we were close to giving up; it was not until yesterday that one of us found where you and a girl had followed a game trail leading to this place."

"You could not have arrived at a better time!"

The chief smiled. Katon, watching from the background, marveled at the striking resemblance of father to son when both smiled.

"At first," said the Cro-Magnard leader, "we were almost afraid to leave the jungle's edge. But no one was about the openings in the walls, and as your trail led straight toward one of them, we decided to follow it. Then, too, all of us were curious to see what manner of people lived in such strange caves.

"No one tried to stop us. In fact, we saw no one at all. I was beginning to wonder if we were the only ones here until we heard sounds of fighting coming from here. The rest you know."

His son nodded. "Soon I shall tell you what I have gone through since I last saw you. But first I have something to do."

He hesitated. How should he go about telling his father? He hoped Dylara would not exhibit that temper of hers the first time she met the chief.

"What must you do?" the chief asked, glancing sharply at the face of his son.

"I have taken a mate!" There—it was out!

HIS father never batted an eye. "Where is she?"

"Somewhere in this place. A prisoner, I suppose. Katon, here, may be able to find her. She—she may not seem pleased that I have come for her."

Those last words came out with an effort. But sooner or later his father was bound to learn he had taken a mate by force.

The elder man pursed his lips to keep from smiling. He was shrewd enough to come very close to the true state of affairs. But what of it? His own courtship had been none too easy. Afterward, Nada and he had been closer than words could express. He had never, nor would ever, lose the pain that had come when she had been taken captive by some strange tribe so many years ago.

Katon, at mention of his name, had stepped forward.

"This," Tharn said, "is Katon—my friend."

There was immediate approval in the eyes of both the blue-eyed Sepharian and the Cro-Magnard chief.

"Dylara probably is in the slave quarters," Katon said. "If you will come with me, I will lead you there."

And shortly thereafter, father and son stood before a great door while Katon removed its heavy bar.

They entered a huge, sunlit room crowded with women, young and old, who shrank away from them in alarm.

There was one, however, who did not draw away. Her lovely face was registering astonishment and disbelief—and hope. One hand lifted slowly to her throat as she stared into the eyes of Tharn's father.

Nor was she alone in displaying tangled emotions. Tharn, the elder, was gazing at the woman as though unable to credit the evidence of his own eyes.

And then the man found his voice.

"Nada!" It was more gasp than a word.

"Tharn—my mate!"

An instant later she was caught up in his arms.

Young Tharn looked on in bewilderment, not grasping, at first, the significance of that single word his father had uttered. Then, as the chief turned toward him, an arm about the woman's shoulders, he understood.

Then his arm, too, was about her; and after twelve long years, father, son, and mother were reunited.

NONE of the three had much to say during the next few minutes. There was an enormous lump in Nada's throat, making speech impossible. She could not take her eyes from the splendid young man who, until a few days

ago, she had thought to be dead. He was everything Dylara had said he was. She remembered him as she had last seen him—a straight-backed, sturdy-legged youngster, whose inquisitive nature and complete lack of fear had given her so many anxious moments. Even at that early age he had shown promise of the extraordinary physical development he now possessed.

But her greatest pride and satisfaction came from what she could see in those frank, compelling gray eyes—eyes mirroring a fine, sensitive soul and an equally fine mind.

"Tell me," Nada said at last, "how did you know I was here?"

"I did not know," admitted her mate. "Did you, Tharn?"

Their son shook his head. "I never dreamed you were in Sephar. As a matter of fact, we came here to find a girl—Dylara, my—my mate. We thought she would be with the slaves."

Then it was that he saw a shadow come into Nada's eyes—a shadow which wiped away his smile and closed a cold hand about his heart.

"Nada!" he exclaimed. "What is wrong? Has something happened to her?"

"She is . . . gone," his mother said dully.

"Gone?"

"Yes. Pryak gave her to a man from a land far to the south of Sephar. He has taken her there with him."

Tharn's face was white beneath its layer of tan. "How long since?" he demanded hoarsely.

"This is the third day."

Without another word the young man wheeled and started for the door. Before he could reach it, however, strong fingers closed on his arm.

His father had stopped him. "Wait, Tharn. Where are you going?"

"After Dylara," said his son grimly.

"Of course; but do not leave so—so abruptly. Let us talk this over before you start. Some of our men will go with you, once we have eaten and slept."

"I am neither tired nor hungry," retorted his son. "I am going alone; others would only delay me."

Katon chose this moment to intervene. "Wait a few hours, Tharn. There is much left to be done here, and we need your help. A new king must be chosen and order restored to the palace and city. Once that is done there will be a feast for all of us; then, after a good sleep, you can set out after Dylara. You can overtake those who have her within two or three suns."

Nada ended the discussion. "Stay until morning, my son," she pleaded. "I have but found you; I cannot bear to let you go so soon."

The smile same back to Tharn's face. "As you will," he conceded. "But when Dyta comes again, I must leave you."

So it was decided, and the four went down to the lower floor to join the others.

THAT night, in the great dining-hall of Sephar's palace, a happy throng sat about a long, wide table laden to its edges with an abundance of foods. At the head sat Katon; at his right hand was Tharn, the elder; and, on his left, was Tharn, the younger, his mother beside him.

Earlier that afternoon the former prisoners and those nobles who had not fallen in defense of Pryak's government, had assembled in the great central hallway to elect a new king. Tharn, to his honest surprise, had been their instant and unanimous choice. But he had declined the honor, saying:

"There is one among you who has every right to rule over you. He, himself, is the son of a king—one who understands all those things expected of a

ruler. That man is Katon of Huxla!"

The roar of approval which followed his words reached far beyond Sephar's walls. Katon would have protested but he had no chance of making himself heard, and he accepted—hiding his pleasure as best he could. He did not dream what a pang that speech had cost his Cro-Magnard friend, for with those words Tharn had relinquished his hope of taking the Sepharian back with him to the caves of his father.

Later in the day an armed force had entered the temple of Sephar's God; and while the feet of those faint-hearted members in the group had dragged somewhat, none had turned back.

However, no resistance had materialized; instead, a horde of priests, arms held high, hands empty, had welled up from the subterranean maze below the temple and begged the new ruler to accept them as his own loyal followers.

Among them was the Council of Priests, intact to a man—except for one. But that one was he whom Katon —and Vulcar!—had desired most to see: Pryak, high priest and Sephar's former king.

It was then that the new king displayed his ability to make sensible decisions. Before leaving the temple he had appointed Cardon as high priest to the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken. Nor could he have made a wiser choice; for Cardon was possessor of a rugged honesty as well as a lack of ambition beyond his position. The long-standing feud between Church and State was ended.

Once these matters had been disposed of, Katon had sent his soldiery to assemble the residents of Sephar at the palace grounds. When a huge throng had filled not only the grassy expanse but the street as well, Katon, as ruler of Sephar, had proclaimed the new government and asked that they acknowledge, as their king, a warrior in place of a priest.

The thunderous, welcoming roar which greeted his words was all that was needed to make of Sephar a unified community. Katon had immediately proclaimed a two day holiday, to be given over to feasting and drinking; and, because he was a shrewd judge of human nature, he had announced that every citizen must sacrifice some valued article to the God, whose help had made the revolt a success.

AND so it was that on this night all Sephar, from palace to city walls, was in a merry-making mood. Within the palace dininghall, there was only a single tiny cloud to mar the clear sky of happiness; a cloud fast losing the dark hue it at first had assumed.

This bit of gloom was caused by the absence of Dylara. But when young Tharn had had an opportunity to reflect, there had come the certainty that Dylara would be back with him before many suns. Tharn knew he could cover in one day three times the distance that the slow-moving men from Ammad could travel in that same period of time. And while they must camp while Dyta slept, Tharn could go on across nocturnal jungles and plains without being forced to slack his speed.

Vulcar, earthen goblet in hand, was bellowing out an anecdote of the days when he had been a young warrior, when the hangings behind Tharn's bench swayed as though touched by a random current of air.

Because all eyes were fixed on the speaker, and because the faint candle light failed to reach much beyond the table, none saw the half crouched figure that stealthily pushed aside the curtain and tip-toed into the room. The intruder's lips were curled in a crazed

grimace of hate; in one hand was clutched a long blade of polished stone.

Nada, pausing in her eating from time to time to gaze fondly at her broad-shouldered son, caught a glimpse of something moving among the shadows directly behind the young man. What was it that lurked there?

Suddenly Nada screamed—a high-pitched, tearing sound that cut through the babble of voices about the table.

With the first notes of the scream, a figure behind Tharn bounded forward and drove a flint knife deep into the naked back of the surprised Cro-Magnard.

Nada's terrified cry was all that saved Tharn from instant death. For he was rising from his stool and turning as the scream left her lips. As a result, the knife point entered his back at an angle, ripping through the muscles there to enter the lower tip of one lung.

Tharn, despite his agony, reached for the would-be assassin. But another was there before him—Vulcar, the hawk-faced.

The one-time captain of Urim's guards had vaulted the table in a flying leap and with a powerful sweep of his arm, knocked away the knife. Then he caught the man about the neck and forced him into a kneeling position.

"So, Pryak," cried the hawk-faced one, "you would add another killing to your list! Long have I waited for this —now comes your reward for the death of Urim!"

Pryak opened his lips to plead for mercy, but before the words could come he was whirled up from the floor as though he were a figure of straw. Then, as the others watched in awe, Vulcar brought the screaming man down on the edge of the massive table.

There was a crunching sound from splintering bones, one last nerve-tearing cry of agony and fear—and Pryak, the ambitious, was gone to his reward.

As the guests stood staring down at the broken form, a thin trickle of blood appeared at one corner of Tharn's mouth and coursed to his chin. Dazedly he lifted a hand to wipe away the stain, then his knees gave way, and before the paralyzed company could prevent, Tharn, the son of Tharn, had pitched to the floor.

WHEN complete consciousness first returned, he was aware of a great mound of soft skins beneath him; and he opened tired eyes to a sun-flooded room. For a little while he was content to remain so, staring at the stone ceiling.

Later, he slowly turned his head and looked into the eyes of Nada. For a few minutes mother and son did not speak; then she reached out to touch his hand.

"You have come back to us, Tharn," she said softly.

Tharn pondered over her remark. When he spoke he was startled by the feebleness of his voice.

"How long have I lain here?"

"Half a moon."

"Half a—!" He sought to sit up, but sank back as a stabbing pain shot through his chest.

"No, no, Tharn!" cried Nada. "You still are not well. The wound in your back is not completely healed, and the jungle fever left you only a little while ago."

Tharn frowned. He was so very tired. "But—Dylara . . . I must go after her. I should have found her before this. I must not lie here while she—"

Then, as an unsupportable weariness flooded his body, he closed his eyes. In another moment he was sleeping soundly.

* * *

ANOTHER half moon had passed. Today had dawned bright and fair. Dyta, the sun, had pulled his blazing head above the eastern earth-line an hour before, tearing the jungle fog into rapidly dissolving streamers of mist.

A group of three—two men and a woman—walked through twin gates in Sephar's rock walls and moved slowly toward the somber shadows of the jungle south of the city. A few yards short of the green wall they came to a halt on a slight, grass-covered elevation.

"I must leave you here," said young Tharn. "Within a few suns—a moon, at most—I will return. Dylara will be with me."

The older man nodded. "Your mother and I leave for home before long. We shall wait there for you and your mate."

"You will not need to wait long," said the young man confidently.

He placed an arm about the man's wide shoulders, pressed the hand of his mother in silent farewell, then turned and strode toward the wall of verdure and towering forest giants to the south.

Together, Tharn, the elder, and Nada, his mate stood on the little green mound, watching the lithe figure of their only son until it disappeared into the forbidding jungle. Beyond that first rampart of lofty trees, of tangled vines and creepers, lay a mysterious land, never before trod by any known member of their world. What hidden dangers lurked there? What savage tribes? What unknown and terrible beasts?

A shudder passed through the woman's slender body. The man at her side slipped a strong arm about the trembling shoulders in unspoken understanding.

"He will come back?" she asked, her voice unsteady. It was half question, half statement; and in those words ran an undercurrent of mingled hope and fear.

"Yes," said the man, his own voice strong and very certain. "He will come back."

THE END

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COBLENTZ

HIS FACE red with haste, and his blue eyes glittering, Dan Holcomb burst into the laboratory.

"Just look at this, Lucile!" he cried, flinging his hat halfway across the room, and almost dancing in his joy. "Lord! Look at this, will you!"

Lucile Travers glanced up from her Bunsen burner, and stared in surprise at Dan's six-foot bulk. She was used to her lover's flaming enthusiasms; but never had she seen him so beside himself. How boyish he seemed, with his lean, keen, studious face, and eyes that were all a blaze of youthful delight!

"There! Take a peep at that, old girl!" he rushed on, as he snapped out his wallet and displayed a handsomely embossed letter.

Her eyes popped half out of her head as she glanced at the sheet. "Twenty-five — twenty-five thousand dollars, Dan!" she gasped. "Why, it —it can't be real!"

"But it *is* real! Boy! this isn't any pipe dream, believe me! A neat twenty-five thousand—that's what I'm offered for my Deflector!"

While she stared at him dazedly, he

did an impromptu hop, skip and jump. She did not need to be told about the Cosmic Deflector—had she not been at Dan's side during these many months when he had worked at it? Had she not shared his enthusiasm at the Gravitational Ray Theory?—the idea that gravity was due to an invisible ray shot out by the electrons and hence was akin to electricity in its origin? Had she not believed, with him, that this ray formed a current, which, like electricity, could be bent, or twisted from its course? Had she not glowed at the discovery of the telurium compound—telurox, they called it—which, on burning, would send out beams that diverted the rays of gravity? And had they not, poring together over his plans, decided that it would be possible to alter the movements of the very planets?

All this was in the girl's mind as her eyes raced along the lines of that incredible letter. It was from Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine, a well known firm of construction engineers. And there was no doubt that it actually did offer $25,000!—$25,000 for all rights in the Deflector, along with Dan's services for a year!

"Who'd have thought it?" enthused the inventor. "Why, Bert Wilcox—you know, my old college chum—introduced me to Wiley only last Tuesday, and told about the Deflector. When Wiley asked me to lay the plans before him, I didn't imagine—"

He rambled on for a minute, then broke short. "But good heavens, Lucy, let's forget all that! It's not the Deflector I want to think about! It's you! You, Lucy! Don't you see? Our waiting—it's over now!"

She did indeed see. For three years they had been engaged, almost since the day when they had met as laboratory assistants here at Columbia Chemicals. But Dan, saddled with the care of his aged parents, had seen no way out of a financial morass that might mean further years of waiting.

Down from her vivid brown eyes and over her lovely face the tears were streaming as his strong arms gathered about her and she pressed close to him in confidence and love.

Yet why was it that, even in this moment of their triumph, a gnawing suspicion crept over her, chilling her joy with a dull clutching uneasiness?

THERE WAS a look of steel-and-granite on Dan's ordinarily cheerful face as he came striding home. He had only a wan smile for his bride of three months as she greeted him at the door of their little apartment.

"Don't mind me, Lucy, if I act like a man with his last penny gone," he explained, after a moment. "It's those damned fellows Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine. Well, you know I've suspected they weren't all above board."

"What's the trouble now?"

He came close to her, and she noticed how red his face was, and how his arms trembled.

"They're worse than Hitler, that's what the trouble is! Want to make me their stooge, the crawling worms!"

He took a turn or two about the room, then went on, more composedly.

"Remember how I agreed to use the Deflector to pull the earth a few thousand miles off its course—only a few thousand, for experimental purposes! Well, now it's more than that distance off, and getting further every minute. This afternoon I put it up to them that we'd better send things into reverse. What do you think they did? Laughed at me!"

"I don't call it exactly a laughing matter."

"Believe me, it's not! That fellow

Wiley came up, with his horse-like face and black eyes that seemed to drill right into me. 'Listen here, old boy,' he said. 'I'll let you into a secret. We haven't any idea of putting the earth back on its orbit —not just yet! We'll let the distance widen a few million miles. We're going to raise hell on this planet—simply hell!' "

"My glory, is he crazy?"

"Not by a long shot! That's the terrible part of it. They outlined their scheme to me—enough, anyhow, to show it's the most diabolical plot ever hatched. Thought I would work with them. 'Never fear, you'll get your share of the swag, old fellow!' Wiley promised. What does he take me for —a louse?"

The vivid blue flames of his anger seemed to leap straight out of Dan's eyes.

"Well, what is their plot?"

"To steal the planet—make themselves a World Triumvirate, the dirty cutthroats! Their scheme is clever too, clever as the devil!"

By degrees he explained the conspiracy, so far as he knew it. Wiley and his colleagues intended to deflect five or ten per cent of the sun's gravity, so sending the earth several million miles farther into space. This would not be fatal, but would cause great climatic inconveniences, and would so alarm the whole world that it would pay any price to get back on its orbit. By that time the agents of the Triumvirate would be planted in every country—Quislings of the sort that can always be bribed by the prospect of a little power, a little notoriety. When the present national leaders had been frightened out of their wits, they would be willing, even eager to turn over the reins to the Triumvirate "for the duration of the emergency," in the belief that Hogarth and his fellows would save the earth. Meanwhile the Triumvirs would establish a secret police. They would demand control of the armies, navies and air fleets of the earth. And they would win reputations as wizards who had rescued the globe—and so would gain popular support everywhere. By the time the planet was back in its proper orbit they would have it, literally, in the palms of their hands.

"Even if they didn't tell me all the details," Dan finished, "I could guess what they left unsaid. Fact is, they're nothing but a gang of hijackers, saying 'Your money or your life!' to the whole world. The worst of it is, they'll have us all in such an infernal hole that it'll be too late unless we act darned soon!"

"What surprises me," meditated Lucile, "is that they should take you into their confidence."

"Probably they didn't doubt my loyalty, after the way I've worked with them all these months. Besides, that fellow Hogarth made a remark I didn't like. Turning that beefy red face of his toward me, with a wicked twinkle in his racoon-like eyes, he said, 'The man who works with us, Holcomb, will have power and glory. But the man who works against us will be—underground!"

There was a look of terror on Lucile's face as Dan went on, "Naturally, I made out to be on their side. Hope to heaven they weren't able to see through me!"

THE smell of burning, from the direction of the kitchen, offered Lucile temporary diversion. And when she had returned from her scorched dinner pots, Dan had come to his decision.

"Only one thing to do, Lucy! I'll go to the police at once. If they act in time—well, maybe they'll still save

the world."

Already he had seized his hat, and was halfway to the door.

"For mercy's sake, be careful!" she pleaded, distracted.

"Don't you worry, I'll do my best. Wait here for me, Lucy. I'll be back in half an hour."

Despite her appeals, he was already halfway into the outer hall. She was never to forget the brave, tragical look of his grimly set face. She knew that she could not hold him back; that she had no right to hold him back. Yet something seemed to rise up in her throat and choke her as the door slammed and she knew that he was gone.

A deep depression had settled over her when the specified half hour had passed and he had not returned. When the half hour had lengthened into an hour, uneasiness gave place to alarm. When an hour had been extended to two, alarm rose to terror. At last, after two hours, her dread got the better of her and she telephoned the police.

No! there had been no accident to a Daniel Holcomb! No! he had not come to the station that evening! No, sorry, but they could not send out detectives to investigate! "Don't think there's any need of that, Ma'am," the sergeant finished. "Chances are he met some old pal and went off for a drink, and just forgot the time."

But Lucile, as she put down the receiver, knew that Dan had not "gone off for a drink." Realizing that he had not even reached the station, she understood that her gravest misgivings had been justified. And then it was that, for the first time, she broke down and wept.

PROBABLY no one who lived through the summer of 1977 will forget the consternation, the terror that convulsed the planet. It was in late May when astronomers reported unforeseen perturbations in the earth's orbit; and by early June it had been officially confirmed that we were off our proper path in space. At first the variation was slight—a mere few thousand miles. But with the passage of weeks, our distance from the sun widened until the earth was off its course by a million, two million, five million miles!

No hypothesis put forth by science could explain the occurrence. It was suggested that some dead, dark sun, from the depths of space, had caught our world in its gravitational pull. But in that case, would it not also have affected Mars, Jupiter, and the other planets? Yet these, except for minute variations ascribable to the earth's altered position, were unaffected!

But few persons, those desperate days, cared much about the theory behind the event. What concerned them was the peril to their own existence. Already the disturbances were acute. By mid-July, New York and London shivered in snow flurries; the frost had ruined agriculture in half the north temperate regions; while in the Argentine and South Africa, which were now experiencing their winter, hundreds of thousands were freezing to death. Meanwhile blizzards and tornadoes swept the globe; tidal waves, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions testified to the upset of the age-old equilibrium; while thunder storms of unexampled severity, floods, and meteoric displays of a brilliance never known before, added to the protests of the elements and the terror of the people.

Long before the summer was over, men began to resign themselves to the idea that life on earth was near its end. For, not only were we receiving less solar radiation than formerly, but the years and therefore the seasons

were being lengthened; hence the winters would be unendurably severe. As we drifted ever farther into space, an unlifting frost would settle over every portion of the globe, including the tropics; and life, frozen and starved, would disappear.

It was on July 15 that the world was electrified by an announcement appearing in newspapers throughout the world. A celebrated firm of construction engineers, Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine, had not only discovered the root of the trouble but had contrived a way to cure it. However, they would need the cooperation of every man, woman and child on earth; they must be given control of all the world's resources, of all mines, power-plants, factories, and systems of transportation, in order to throw everything that mankind possessed into the battle.

At any other time, such a proposal would have been laughed to scorn. But now, when the world's nerves were stretched taut with terror, men were eager to clutch at any straw. A committee of alleged experts (who, it subsequently turned out, were in the pay of Hogarth and Company) endorsed the claims of the self-styled saviors of the world; legislative groups, likewise in their pay, voted them unlimited power; dictators and presidents, in despair, gave them the right of way over great nations. But what did this matter? What did anything matter, except that Earth be saved from destruction?

IN A concrete-walled, electrically lighted basement chamber, originally intended as a store-room, a prisoner stalked restlessly. Up and down, up and down, up and down the ten-by-twelve windowless space he wandered. His eyes were bloodshot; his fingers twitched uneasily; his rumpled clothes bore the signs of a recent struggle. At one side of the room, on a rude work-bench, some food and water stood untouched. From outside the closed doors, he could hear the obscene jests exchanged by two armed guards.

His mind reeled as he recalled the events of the past few hours; how three men, amid the fogs of twilight, had surrounded him as he emerged from the apartment house to go for the police; how one of them had clapped a gag over his mouth, and the other two had forced him into a waiting sedan. . . . So swiftly had it all happened that he could hardly piece together the successive steps of the crime in logical order.

Yet that the deed had been ordered by his former employers was manifest. His horror at their plans had been evident, much as he had tried to conceal it! Their secret police were already functioning! Undoubtedly one of them, eavesdropping at the door of his apartment, had overheard his remarks to his wife, which he had made little effort to subdue. And now that he was in the enemy's power, he would have no chance to thwart or reveal their schemes!

Contemplatively he gazed about his jail. Bare walls! a bare floor! Not a tool by which he might attempt to escape! The prisoner felt in his pockets —even his knife had been taken from him. He thought of his wife—and knew that she would be growing frantic. Yet, though he realized that the odds against him were thousands to one, he would not let himself despair. For a long while he leaned meditatively against a wall, his brows wrinkled, his glance withdrawn, as he pondered, pondered over ways and means to surmount his barriers. For upon his escape, he knew, the world's freedom depended.

IT WAS with the air of a beaten dog that, one afternoon in early August, Hogarth came slouching into his mahogany-paneled headquarters in the twenty-two-story office building he had recently appropriated.

As July turned into August, the earth's movements had become more erratic than ever. Even to the naked eye, the sun's disk had grown appreciably smaller. The Antarctic cold had begun to lay a white blanket over jungles beneath the Equator; while already the trees of the eastern United States had taken on the hues of October. No one who lived through those disconsolate days will forget the tragic aspect of our cities: thoroughfares almost deserted, and only an occasional business house still open; a handful of people passing, with wan features and drooping heads; and only one question on any one's lips, "When, when will it end?"

With the haste of panic, Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine had been granted everything they asked. They had been placed in control of all natural resources, all factories and railways, all armies and navies. They had been given *carte blanche* with the earth. All other rulers took orders from them. They were, as they had aimed to be, universal dictators. This tremendous power had been granted them, so that they might save us all, as they had promised. Then why did they not save us? men asked, chattering with cold and terror.

They might have had their answer had they seen Hogarth sagging into his office on that August afternoon. Rubbing his fleshy red face with an equally fleshy red hand, he dropped into a seat, and grumbled, "Guess it's no use, boys! Simply don't seem able to turn the trick!"

Wiley had leaped to his feet. His horse-like teeth were unbared beneath curling lips. "God! Mean to say she won't work?"

"No, blast it, she won't," concurred Malvine, who had come in just behind Hogarth. "Haven't the two of us been slaving like teamsters, along with McBride and a whole army of engineers? That cursed Deflector has gone haywire! Why, I'll swear we diverted gravity enough to pull the earth halfway over to Venus. And what are the results? Nil. Precisely nil!"

Wiley stood regarding his fellow plotters in silence. An unpleasant smirk formed itself upon his lips.

"Well, don't worry, boys. In the long run, a day or two more or less won't matter."

"No, I'll be cursed if it will!" growled Hogarth. "Nothing in hell will matter if we die along with everybody else!"

Wiley gasped. "What makes you so damned cheerful?"

"Well, how we going to save ourselves? I'm putting it to you straight, old man. What if we are world dictators? We're doomed like every beetle and rat on this crazy planet. The whole rotten globe is going to freeze!"

"Afraid that's so," agreed Malvine, with a wry puckering of his long, fox-like face. "We've tried hard enough, but we've about shot our bolt. Frankly, there isn't any known principle by which we can get the Deflector working again."

For the first time, a pallor had come across Wiley's features. He was the scheming brains of the firm, but had not kept up on his science, and always took his colleagues' word on technical matters.

For a while, he remained silent, his saturnine face grave with thought. "By thunder," he finally broke out, "I'm not going to let myself die just yet—

not when I've got the world in my hands! There's one man who'll be able to help out with that damned Deflector."

"Who's your genius?" sneered Malvine.

"Well, who but this fellow Holcomb?"

"Holcomb?"

"Of course. He's harmless now—but useless—in his underground storeroom. I'm for taking him out—under proper supervision. He'll know how to use the Deflector, if any man does!"

Hogarth's gloom relaxed a bit. "Good!" he approved. "Can't do any harm to try. We've got to make damned sure, though, he doesn't get loose or communicate with his friends. I'd a thousand times rather shoot him like a yellow dog!"

Wiley chuckled; and the hands of all three conspirators shot out in agreement.

DAN'S face was pale after his long confinement. His cheeks were sunken, and had the smoldering look of deep suffering. But there was scorn in his manner as he faced his persecutors.

"Yes, that's the story," Wiley was reiterating. "Guess we're not quite on to the ropes. If you'll work a little at the Deflector—"

Dan glared at his tormentors, his eyes kindled with a fierce blue glitter. His chin was outthrust, but his manner was quiet as he replied, after a moment's hesitation, "Show me to the laboratory!"

Wiley arose, and prepared to lead the way.

"We'll give you one week!" he stipulated. "Exactly one week! By then, we'll expect you to show results!"

After being escorted blindfolded to a secret laboratory, Dan labored incessantly. He would pretend to obey the Triumvirs, while actually doing all he could to oppose them! But in the beginning, he had to confess to himself, his position looked nearly hopeless. Eagerly he searched for some possible means of escape—some way of signalling the outside world. But two armed guards stood watching just beyond the only door.

His most pressing thought was to get word to his wife—not only to relieve her terrible anxiety, but to plot with her his escape. He had, naturally, been denied access to a telephone; yet he would not let this balk him. Deftly making use of the electrical gear and headphones of a half dismantled short-wave radio receiver which he had found in the laboratory, he set about to tap the wires in a remote corner where, he noted, a telephone connection had formerly been. Meanwhile he was careful to keep as wide a distance as possible between him and the guards.

To prevent them from hearing his voice when he had tapped the wire, he set a particularly noisy motor in operation close to the door. Then, trembling with eagerness, he spoke through his improvised speaking apparatus. To his delight, he heard an answering, "Number, please!" His tones were jerky with excitement as he gave his home number. But, a moment later, his joy froze within him.

Across the wire there came a sickening, "The line has been disconnected, sir!" And in response to his quavering inquiry, all he could get was, "No, sir, they mentioned no other number to call."

He was just about to give another number—that of a friend who might be able to supply information about Lucile—when he felt a heavy hand on one shoulder, and looked up into the angry eyes of his guards.

"None of that, young man!" bawled one jailer, while the other snatched up the telephone equipment. "I thought you were up to some mischief! Get back to work!"

Two rubber truncheons came down upon Dan's defenseless flesh as, with a groan, he struggled back to his bench.

AS LATE August shivered toward September, the world's state became still more terrifying. Whirlwinds rushed more severely than ever through the darkening skies; blizzards raged, and a mantle of white covered the northern United States; agriculture and industry had virtually ceased; and men passed their time in mumbling prayers, in making wild, fruitless studies of the heavens, and in the sodden forgetfulness of dissipation.

Dan, however, knew nothing of all this as he labored in his hidden laboratory. Working once more at the Deflector, in the desire to save the earth from freezing, he had made a discovery —one which, as he toiled, had darkened his face with lines of discouragement that gradually gave place to horror. And in the end he had sagged down, exhausted, with bloodshot eyes and drooping limbs . . . oppressed with a nightmare realization.

During the weeks of his imprisonment, the earth had moved millions of miles farther from the sun. And the strength of telurox, lessening with the inverse square of the distance, was insufficient to cover the gap. It was beyond his power to make up the difference. Unless a miracle intervened, the earth was doomed!

Nevertheless, was there not just the remotest hope?—possibly a chance in a million? If only he could gain control of a larger laboratory, with capable assistants, he might try a certain newly conceived experiment. But to ask his captors to provide such a laboratory would be to put himself and the earth even more hopelessly in their power.

Instead, his thoughts kept wandering in another direction. If he could once get into touch with his wife, she might be able to help him! But where was she now? Somewhere in hiding? Or imprisoned by the Triumvirs? Yet if she were still at liberty, was there not a means by which he might still communicate with her? He recalled how, during their years together at Columbia Chemicals, they had worked out a secret code, by which they could tap out love messages on the walls. Could this code not be used over the radio? Could he not transmit signals over various wave-lengths, so that sooner or later—if she still listened to the radio — she would recognize his message?

At any rate, he would try. Hoping to ward off suspicion, he pretended to work at a Cosmic Deflector which, telescope-shaped and two feet in thickness, reached from floor to ceiling. Within this great tube he concealed a small radio transmitter which he had hastily contrived, out of the abundant electrical equipment of the Deflector. Its power, he knew, would be limited, but it could be heard well enough locally. By means of a device resembling an electric bell, he was able to transmit signals, on a dot and dash system. So rapidly did he work that, after a few hours, this novel broadcaster was sending out its rat-tat-tat.

His next step was to repair the half dismantled radio receiver. This task completed, he began to tap out signals, "Lucile! Lucile! Hear me! I am imprisoned by the Triumvirs! Follow my directions, and we may still save the world!"

Time after time—hundreds of times

—he repeated this message. Was he but playing a fool's game? So he asked himself as the hours stretched out; as the days dragged past and still no answer came. Was he not wasting his efforts while the earth whirled to its doom?

IT WAS on the fourth day of the experiment. Pale with anxiety and fatigue, Dan still tapped out his messages; still listened at the radio. Suddenly he stood up, with a start. What was that sound he heard? That answering tap, tap, tap? Three shorts and a long—three shorts and a long! In their code, what did that mean? "Where are you? Tell me, where are you?" Or had he counted the signals wrongly. In desperate eagerness, he stood listening. Now there came two longs and a short; then a short and two longs—

"Well, old man, how's the work going?"

Dan was so shocked that he leapt back several feet. Not more than a yard away, leering with a horse-like grin, was the face of Wiley! And just in the background, devilishly gaping, were Hogarth and Malvine.

Dan's first thought was that the enemy knew what he was about, and had come to mock him at the moment of his seeming success.

"Well, how's she going?" Wiley reiterated. "Any progress?"

With an effort, Dan snapped out of his stupefied silence. "Oh, she's promising very well," he managed to say.

Through the radio, with maddening insistency, came the rat-tat-tat of a message. It was impossible, under the circumstances, to record or translate it! The thought flashed over Dan that he had been tricked; that the message came from the Triumvirs, who were now enjoying his discomfiture!

"What's that damned noise?" Hogarth demanded, as if to lend confirmation to this theory.

Reaching for a secret switch, Dan snapped off the radio. Only a clever bluff, he knew, could save him now!

"Oh, it's only the magnified sound of the impact of the gravitational rays upon the Deflector," he lied, glibly, still hoping against hope. "In other words, the vibrational impetus of—"

"To hell with your long-winded explanations!" Wiley cut him short, impatiently. "What we want to know is, what progress have you made? Any sign of getting the earth back in place?"

"Time we gave you is about up!" said Malvine. "If you're not getting results, better turn things over to some one else!"

"Everything's in the devil's own mess!" sighed Hogarth. "It's hell on earth—people freezing to death right and left. By God! if I thought you weren't getting somewhere, I'd have you choked to death, just for the fun of it!"

"Well, as a matter of fact," fabricated Dan, "the Super-Detectonic rays are a bit slow in getting into operation. But you can't expect miracles. If you'll give me a little more time—a few more days, maybe a week—I'll promise you results."

A cold sweat had broken out all over him before he had explained, in scientific detail, just why he might succeed if given another week. Thank God! they had not suspected! Or had they suspected?—and were they only toying with him? In any case, they had, wittingly or unwittingly, broken into his experiment at the crucial point. Would he ever again catch the interrupted message?

His fingers shaking with eagerness, he turned back to the radio. But even as he did so, the sneer on Wiley's re-

treating face hit him like a taunt.

AFTER the first cruel shock, Lucile had realized just what was behind Dan's disappearance. She not only was sure that he had been kidnapped by Hogarth and his gang, but that any effort on her part to report to the police would result in her own immediate apprehension. Already her position was perilous — might the conspirators not finish the job by seizing her at any moment? There was nothing to be done, therefore, except to change her residence, without informing anyone where she was going. Then, in secret, she might plan to free her husband.

At first, however, no tenable idea came to her. Meanwhile, through her old professors at Merlin University, where she had been an excellent student, she obtained access to the chemical laboratory, and experimented day and night for means to increase the power of telurox. If it were possible to divert to the earth enough of the gravity that shot past it into space, might the planet not even now be drawn back to its orbit?

For weeks she labored, without results. She was merely one more discouraged person in a discouraged world, when at length a startling incident occurred. She had gone out for a hasty bite of lunch, and on her return she noticed that her assistant, young Dick Harson, was listening to the radio, as he often did, while munching at a sandwich.

"Well, anything new?" she asked, with a faint smile.

"Nothing but a crazy noise, like a telegrapher breaking in on the broadcast," he answered. "If it's still on, I'll show you."

He switched the dial. "There it is!" he exclaimed, after a moment. "Doesn't it sound just like a secret code?"

At first she listened indifferently, her mind preoccupied; then gave a start, for she recognized something astoundingly familiar. Surely, it was but an accident! It must be an accident that the succession of long and short syllables made sense, according to her old code with Dan! "Imprisoned by the Triumvirs! Follow my directions, and we may still save the world."

Harson was astonished to see how eagerly the young woman sprang from her seat; and how she stood staring, as if she had seen a ghost.

With the frenzy of a famished person finding food, she bent down to listen. For a minute she remained there, leaning over the radio with a puzzled look, as if she could not quite make out the message. Then, to Harson's still greater amazement, she dashed to the laboratory's short wave transmitter, and, beating together two bits of metal, began to send out a series of long and short sounds, similar to the signals they had heard.

By this time the rat-tat-tat from the other end had ceased. It was more than half an hour later, when she had paused to rest momentarily, that fresh signals came over the radio. A flood of tears rushed to her eyes as she made out the words, "Lucile! Lucile -it is I!"

"TAKE this down, Lucy! Bismuth tetrachloride in combination with the borium salt I just mentioned will have a catalyzing effect on telurox, increasing its activity fifty per cent— more than enough to bring the earth back to its orbit. So my experiments indicate. Try it out just as soon as possible!"

Such was one of the first messages that Dan tapped out to his wife, after a few explanatory interchanges.

"For God's sake, hurry! At any

minute those bandits may catch on!" the message continued. "Let me hear the results as soon as you can! We've just got to succeed, and trap them!"

Several days went by, while the signals still flashed back and forth. But Dan knew, as did Lucile also, that their time was short, very short. All too soon the week allowed him by Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine passed; all too soon the sinister three paid him another visit.

They found him still working at the Deflector, from whose interior once more a strange rat-tat-tat was issuing.

"Well," demanded Hogarth, "what success?"

Dan looked up casually. "Oh," he declared, trying to appear unconcerned, "as much as could be expected."

"What the devil does that mean?" snapped Wiley, projecting his ridged horse-face pugnaciously. "You promised results in a week. Have you had them? Can you put the earth back on its orbit?"

"If you'll give me more time—"

"More time, and we'll all be driven to our deaths!" stormed Malvine. "Not another day! No, not another hour!"

Wiley, who had been peering into the recesses of the Deflector, was fumbling in an exploratory fashion at its fittings. Suddenly he pulled a half concealed lever, released a panel, and let out a low whistle. "What in blazes is this?"

With an angry wrench, he drew out a mass of wires, bulbs and batteries. "Looks to me like a radio transmitter!" he growled.

All three men glared menace at Dan. He had foreseen and dreaded this very event. Confronted with the evidence, it would be folly to attempt a denial. His only course would be to try to turn suspicion in the least dangerous channel.

"Of course it's a radio transmitter," he admitted, quietly. "I'll be frank with you — I was hoping to find a chance to get away."

Ominously the three conspirators closed about him. There was a nasty rumble in Wiley's voice as he decided, "Well then, you damned traitor, it's up to us to put you where you won't get away—not for many a good long day! We were cursed fools to place any trust in you!"

Abruptly he motioned to the guards. "Solitary confinement again — and a bread and water diet!" he barked. "Maybe that'll bring him around to reason!"

But even as Dan, bound and handcuffed, was being dragged off, he had grim satisfaction in reflecting that his persecutors could not guess the real purpose of his radio.

BY THE first of September, the earth was farther off its course than ever. Eleven million, twelve million, thirteen million miles! And every day the distance widened. Would its orbit, like that of a periodic comet, be lengthened into a long ellipse, taking it into the unthinkable cold beyond Jupiter or Saturn?

This was the question in every one's mind, when on September 2 a full-page advertisement appeared in America's leading papers: "$50,000 Reward! For invention to counteract the Cosmic Deflector! All reasonable propositions given immediate personal attention. Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine."

It was on the never-to-be-forgotten third of September that the advertisers received their first applicant for the award. It was a young woman, of sad and earnest appearance; and the clerk who questioned her, perceiving that she had extraordinary information to offer, lost no time about summoning Hogarth.

"My name is Landers—Mary Lan-

ders," she introduced herself. "I was a laboratory assistant of Daniel Holcomb when he invented telurox. I have been trying to increase its power, and have had remarkable success. In fact, I come to claim that fifty thousand."

Hogarth gasped.

The caller went on to explain how, as a result of a long series of computations, she had mixed a small quantity of a certain bismuth salt with the telurox; and how this had increased its activity by more than fifty per cent. Fortunately, a huge Deflector had already been set up in the laboratory, for experimental purposes.

"Have you taken any observations today?" she finished. "If so, perhaps you've noticed that the earth is fifty thousand miles nearer the sun than yesterday."

"By glory!" exclaimed Hogarth. "That's just what Lasson Observatory reported, but I thought those fellows were all soused. Let's see! Got a model machine to show me?"

"Everything's over at Merlin University. If you'll just step into your car, we'll be there in twenty minutes."

"You bet I will!" agreed Hogarth eagerly, as he reached for his hat. "No harm looking at it!"

The young woman started toward the door; then turned back, as if on an after-thought. "Oh, by the way, don't your partners want to join us? I'd like to give a real demonstration, which it would waste a lot of good time and energy to repeat."

"Don't see what they've got on hand more important," muttered Hogarth. "Wait a minute."

From an adjoining room she could hear Hogarth's voice rising disputatiously. "No harm investigating, anyhow!" And she could not keep back a secret exultation when, after a time, he appeared in company with two men whom he introduced as "Mr. Wiley" and "Mr. Malvine."

HALF an hour later, she had led them into the University laboratory, a corner of which had been partitioned off. There a twenty-four-inch telescope-like tube shot up through the ceiling; while nearer at hand was a table covered with complicated electrical devices.

"Well, trot out your discoveries!" barked Wiley.

From a compartment Miss Landers drew three pairs of binoculars, with wires attached. "Adjust these, gentlemen," she instructed.

Automatically each man reached for a pair. And as they took them, a look of triumph crossed the woman's averted face. She pressed a button—and with what astonishing results!

All three men gasped, and began to writhe. A convulsive shudder shot through each; they sagged, and fell to the floor; then gradually all three stiffened, except for their necks and faces, which still twitched spasmodically.

At the same time, the young woman pressed a buzzer; and three men, in the uniforms of university guards, hastened in with ropes, which they wound around the helpless trio.

"What—what in hell's name is this?" sputtered Wiley, as he began to recover from the first shock. "We—we're paralyzed!"

"That's just it," stated the lady, calmly. "You're paralyzed, from the necks down. I merely wanted to introduce you to another little invention of your friend Dan Holcomb. He asked me to show it to you, with his compliments. You see, the rays of telurox, much diluted and carried over a wire, will temporarily paralyze the human nerve centers. But have no fear. The spell will wear off in half an hour."

"This—this is an outrage!" groaned Hogarth, as he lay amid his ropes.

"Not at all. I'm sure, when you're no longer paralyzed, you won't mind signing a little paper, containing an order for the release of Mr. Holcomb—"

"What the devil makes you so interested in Holcomb?" flared back Wiley.

"Well, it's only that I happen to be his wife. Mary Landers is the name of a cousin of mine. Dan and I have been planning to get him out of your dungeon when you locked him up there again, as we expected you would. I'm simply carrying out his ideas."

Angry sounds, like the growls of enraged bears, came from the throats of all three prisoners.

"If we sign," demanded Malvine, "will you let us go?"

"There's only one promise I can make. If you don't sign, my friends here"—she designated the three guards —"will see that you remain paralyzed."

The conspirators were trapped, and they knew it; were caught like rats in a corner, beyond rescue by the corrupt system they had built up. And so, after their paralysis had begun to wear off and they had been re-paralyzed several times in succession, they bowed their heads in capitulation.

"Come on," snarled Hogarth, "give us that damned paper!"

He glanced over the sheet, and an even angrier snarl came from his throat.

"You must think we're crazy, young lady!" he roared. "You can go to hell before we'll sign!"

The document was not only an order for Dan's release, but a confession of the criminal manner in which he had been seized and detained.

"Better think it over, gentlemen," advised Lucile, as the prisoners continued to hold out against signing.

AND this was exactly what they did. After more than twelve hours, during which they were allowed neither food nor drink (it being impossible to digest anything in a paralyzed state), the victims realized that they had no chance except to sign, or miserably to perish. And not being of the stuff of which heroes are made, they grumblingly asked the guards to deparalyze them sufficiently to let them sign the paper.

Thus it came about that Dan was again delivered from the basement prison, and that he and his wife were restored to one another's arms. Thus, thanks to his discovery and her application of it, the earth was saved from the most terrible peril in history, and gradually was brought back to its true orbit. And thus, after Dan had broadcasted all he knew about the plots of the Triumvirate, Hogarth, Wiley and Malvine were discredited and disgraced, and, deserted by their confederates, stood trial for Dan's kidnapping and imprisonment. The last that was heard of them, they were still serving their twenty-year terms at Wilmott Penitentiary.

As for the Cosmic Deflector—after the earth's orbit was righted, the secret of it was sealed in a vault at Merlin University. "I've discovered, Lucile," remarked Dan, shortly after his release, "it's not a safe invention to entrust in human hands.

"But there's one thing," he went on, as his lips moved toward hers, "if it drew the earth out of its orbit, it also drew us closer together."

Her answering smile told him that, so far as they were concerned, the Deflector had been a success.

FOR THE BEST IN FANTASY FICTION—FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

QUEEN OF THE FLAMING DIAMOND

by LEROY YERXA

There it was, in a night club, the biggest diamond in the world. Why was it here when a whole race depended on it for existence?

THE Owl Limb Night Club was crowded with smoothly gowned women and paunchy men as Owner George Lardner approached the hanging "mike" to announce the midnight attraction. At Lardner's appearance "Puffy" Adams nudged his well-dressed boss in the ribs and whispered thickly.

"Come on, Jim. Let's get out of here."

Jim Drake lifted a tousled head from the smooth linen. He gazed at his right hand man with a washed-out expression.

"Huh?"

"Puffy" Adams stood up slowly. His coat was wrinkled and creased across his powerful back. He pulled it down impatiently and rubbed a warm hand across his face. Looking down at the unsteady figure of Jim Drake he grunted. Three crooked teeth that seemed at odds with the world, appeared coyly against "Puffy's" lower lip.

He was accustomed to this old routine. Placing both hands under Drake's armpits he lifted. Jim came to his feet with a surprised gurgle.

"Wait a minute," he protested. "Wanta' see dance."

Puffy Adams pushed a thick arm around Drake and steered him across the floor between the tables.

"Special feature tonight —diamond of mystery . . ." The night club owner was still talking, his voice drowning the murmur of voices and tinkle of glasses across the big room. "Sylvia Fanton — girl from nowhere —!"

Puffy struggled onward under the almost dead weight of his boss. Drake was trying to hold back.

"You gave me orders to take you home at midnight," Puffy protested, "and, 'Cinderella' Drake, home you go."

He succeeded in dragging his charge up the three low steps that led toward the coat room. A silvery crash of music drowned out Puffy's voice with the suddenness of striking lightning. He dropped his arm from Drake's waist and pivoted, surprise on his broad face. Something weird and lovely about the sound turned them both toward the stage. His chin dropped in delight.

She went into a weirdly sensuous dance . . .

This wasn't Lardner's usual nightly feature.

They watched with hypnotized eyes as the girl's slim body twisted and swayed from between the bright shower of curtains. It wasn't the girl that caught Puffy's gaze. Cupped in her slim hands was the biggest diamond he had ever seen. The gem was skillfully cut with the perfection of a Tiffany. From its multi-faceted sides a million sparks of rainbow fire quivered and danced through the room. The shadows seemed to come alive and burn under its presence.

Puffy gasped loudly.

"Shhhhh!"

"It ain't true," Puffy said. "A paste if I ever stole one."

Blake leaned on the low rail that bordered the dining room. His legs were spread wide, body balanced unsteadily with firm-gripped hands. George Lardner had picked a winner this time. Clothed in ankle-length silver cloth, she wafted across the floor lightly as a breeze. Sylvia Fanton was a light, floating angel of beauty. Her hair was raven-black drifting to her waist and the eyes, dark as her hair, seemed caught in worship for the precious stone in her hands. She hardly danced yet the smooth torso, the swaying hips held her admirers fixed.

A sigh of longing escaped Drake's lips.

"Wunnerful," he breathed.

"Yea!" Puffy was still watching the great gem. "Not real though."

"Perfect as a dream," Jim Drake went on, not hearing.

"Perfect phony," Puffy insisted.

Drake swung around unsteadily.

"Who you calling phony," he lisped angrily. "That's girl's wunnerful."

He staggered and collapsed against Puffy's barrel chest.

"Home for you," Puffy decided.

HE RETRIEVED Drake like a sack of spuds and placed him carefully on his feet.

"We're going out." He took a last look toward the dance floor and pushed his boss through the curtains toward the outer lobby.

The music behind them stopped. The lights in the dining room blinked out and a woman screamed somewhere in the darkness. Adams didn't wait to find out what had happened. He pushed Drake along the hall toward the coat room. Beside the tall youngster, Adams assumed all the importance of a harbor tug heaving away at an ocean-going liner.

Mary, the checkroom girl, was waiting. When midnight brought Drake from his whiskey, the girl had learned to expect a lavish tip. She looked at Puffy with a puzzled smile.

"What's wrong in there?"

"Revolution," he answered shortly. "Light went out. Lardner probably forgot to pay the light bill."

Jim Drake fumbled uncertainly in his pocket and brought out a numbered ticket.

"Coat please," he said stiffly. "Coat please!"

He waved the ticket under Mary's nose.

She took the stub quickly and returned in a minute with a woman's silver fox cape. It was a lavish, deeply rich fur.

"How long since you started wearing these things?" she asked and pushed it across the counter.

"Hey!" Puffy grunted. "That ain't ours."

Drake clutched the fur protectively.

"Here—here," he cried. "My coat. Just grew whiskers. My coat just the same."

Before Adams could stop him, Drake was lurching toward the door and into

the waiting arms of the doorman. Puffy tossed a bill on the counter and Mary's eyes popped a fraction.

"We'll bring it back when he sobers up," he said quickly. "Must have got the wrong number."

"Thanks!"

"Forget it." He went toward Drake and the grinning doorman. Rescuing his drunken charge, Adams helped him across the walk toward the car.

"Come on, Cinderella. You got a date with the sandman."

Somewhere down State Street came the mournful howl of a siren.

"Whee!" Drake waved the fur in the air above his head. "Fire—want to go to fire."

A CROWD of patrons were pouring from the club behind them. With a quick push Puffy deposited Drake in the streamlined coupe and rounded the rear tires on the run. He jumped behind the wheel and turned the key. Sirens were whining in close now.

The door slammed and a girl landed squarely on Drake's lap.

It was the dancing girl, Sylvia Fanton. Her face was flushed brightly with fright.

"Whee!" Drake shouted gleefully. "The Angel herself. Where's the Tiffany?"

He threw his arms about her slim, silver-clad waist and planted a popping kiss on her cheek. The flat of the girl's hand caught his face, hard. Drake sobered a degree.

"My jacket!" her voice was strained and tense. "Please! I must have it at once."

Drake was interested. His pale eyes started to show fight.

"Sure!" he said. "But it's *my* jacket."

The sirens were dying now. A powerful police car shot to the curb behind them. Puffy's eyes narrowed and he drove the coupe away from the club smoothly.

"Too hot around here," he said to no one in particular. "Can't stand the smell of copper's feet."

Sylvia Fanton's dress was badly ripped on one side. The silken stocking and smooth flesh of her thigh was visible through the tear.

"Please!" There were tears in her cold eyes. "I *must* have the jacket. It *is* mine, you know."

Drake was coy.

"Aw," he insisted. "I had a ticket for it."

She slipped between them, her arm around Drake's shoulder. Realizing that he was drunk, she tried a different approach.

"Now what would you do with it?" she asked sweetly. "You would look funny wearing a silver fox jacket. You'd be just an old fox."

Jim hesitated. Then he slipped the jacket from his arm and around her soft shoulder.

"I'll make a deal with you," he suggested. "Let us take you home and you can have the old animal."

FOR the first time his eyes were clearing enough to get a really good look at the girl at his side. He started to wonder vaguely how she had gotten here. She was small and her tiny face seemed almost cupid-like to his uncertain vision. Her eyes were frightened like the eyes of a timid animal.

"Okay!" Puffy said sharply. "You've made a bargain. I ain't driving all night. Where to?"

Her voice snapped out sharp and cold.

"Nowhere. Stop right here."

Jim Drake chuckled.

"Wait a minute," he stammered. "Be a sport. You promised."

He looked away for an instant, trying to shake some of the fog from his head. When he looked back the girl was gone. There between them on the seat was a small silver fox.

He shook his head dazedly and groaned.

"They got me," he moaned. "Stop car. I got to . . ."

Puffy took his eyes from the road. A sharp oath escaped his lips. The brakes squealed as he felt sharp teeth settle deeply into his wrist. Howling with pain he twisted the coupe to the curb.

The fox released its grip and leaped gracefully over the door into the street. It was gone, weaving swiftly like a small dog through the straggling crowd. It went out of sight quickly into a nearby alley.

"Holy Ned!" Puffy held a bleeding wrist in his good hand. "I'm getting this way from *being* with you."

Jim Drake's lips quivered strangely and he turned pale.

"I wanna' go home. Don't wanna' see anyone. No one, understand?"

Puffy nodded, but Drake persisted brokenly.

"Fox woman, that's what she is. Darned old fox woman wouldn't play fair . . .!" His lips murmured off into something Puffy couldn't understand.

* * *

LONG shafts of sunlight split the obscure shadows that had hidden Jim Drake's room for the past twelve hours. Drake turned over carefully in bed, groaned and reached for the full glass on the table.

"Puffy!" His voice arose in shattering crescendo across the stillness of the rich apartment and crashed against the door. "Puffy—it's me. Take these damned rocks off my head."

Adams opened the door and came forward with a sly grin on his face.

"Okay—Okay." He was impatient. "I'm coming, Cindrella."

Drake swallowed the contents of the glass in a single gulp and stretched out with a sickly grin.

"That was a wonderful dream I had last night," he said weakly. "Remind me to call Walt Disney."

Adams went across the room and drew open the curtains. A two o'clock sun slipped into the room and Drake hid himself hurriedly in the pillow.

"Turn out that damned light," he shouted. "Now—about that fox woman. Walt Disney oughta' pay . . ."

Puffy had braced his feet and placed his stocky arms behind his back.

"It wasn't any dream," he said calmly.

"Yea, I know. I was drunk."

"It wasn't a dream," Puffy said stubbornly. "That girl you saw really was a fox. At least she turned into one. Oh! Damn!"

He tossed the morning paper on the bed.

"Read what the *Star* had to say about your dream," he said. "They got the story straighter than I did. We took a lady for a ride, Cindrella, and she turned into a silver fox."

Drake sat up stiffly. The foolish look of surprise was gone. He reached for the *Morning Star*. In huge headlines he read:

DARING HOLDUP AT NEW NIGHT CLUB

World's Largest Diamond Stolen From Under Eyes of Police

Sober as a lord now, Drake sent his eyes wavering along the column of newsprint:

Chicago, May 6.—A group of daring jewel thieves last night stole the Lardner diamond, largest gem of its kind in the world, from beneath the eyes of an armed guard.

The stone was a perfect cut, pronounced priceless only last week when it was first seen by Tiffany experts.

George Lardner, the owner of the Owl Limb, one of the city's newest night spots, had taken it from a private vault to display in a special dance.

Miss Sylvia Fanton, who danced with the gem has also disappeared, but Lardner insists that she was well known to him and could have had no hand in the robbery.

This story is feasible, as the gown Miss Fanton was wearing at the time has been discovered badly torn in a State Street alley. Murder of the dancer is suspected.

* * *

DRAKE tossed the paper across the room.

"Rubbish!" His eyes were clear and snapping now. The night of adventure was thrown from his mind. "It couldn't happen, Puffy. We were seeing things."

Adams picked up the *Star* carefully, thumbed toward the last page and held the news sheet where Drake could see another, much smaller caption.

"Look at this," he begged. "You'll sing another song."

Jim took the sheet again, as though afraid he *would* believe the impossible. This story was short, and wedged in at the bottom of a last page.

ZOO OFFICIALS CAPTURE FOX RUNNING WILD IN CITY STREET

Captured while trotting calmly down a State Street alley early today, a perfect silver fox has found its home at Wildwood Zoo.

Keepers chuckled when asked for a statement to the press. They expect a fox farm to place a claim on the valuable animal within twenty-four hours.

The fox was in perfect condition, with a deep, rich black coat, tufted with snow white tips on each hair.

The Mayor has already offered to convert the pelt into a cape for his wife, should an owner fail to claim the animal.

Jim Drake shuddered.

"I was drunker than I had any business being last night," he said finally. "Did it all happen, what I saw?"

Puffy Adams grinned woefully. He drew his arm from behind his back and displayed a clean, bandaged wrist.

"I got teeth marks an inch deep in my wrist," he said. "What do you think?"

Drake was out of bed in one bound. He pulled his slippers on hurriedly.

"Plenty of hot water for a shower?"

"Coming up!"

Puffy retreated toward the bathroom door. Over his shoulder he asked.

"Going to the zoo?"

"I'm crazy," Jim admitted. "But if they found a girl's dress a block from where we parked, and there's a silver fox at the zoo this morning, I want to know why."

Puffy's stout figure was hidden behind the glass door. Water started its inviting swish from the shower. His voice came out with a hollow ring.

"Well, Cinderella," he said whimsically, "we're on the make again, but the odds are against us. If that dame can bite my arm and turn into an animal in the same night she'll make a hell of a mate for Jimmy."

Drake was already half-way across the room, knotting the sash of his robe with long brown fingers.

"It's the call of the wild," he shouted above the hiss of the shower. "We all have to answer it some time."

* * *

HALF WAY out of town Jim Drake drew the coupe skillfully to the curb and turned off the motor. He had parked opposite the city library. Drake felt much better this morning. The sobering effect of the *Morning Star* had made a new man of him in short order. Dressed neatly in a brown sport suit, clean white shirt and white shoes, Jim looked his type perfectly. Young bachelor with cash to burn, yet with a certain dissatisfaction in himself that

had etched little wrinkles around the clear brown eyes.

He pushed the door open and tapped Puffy Adams lightly on the shoulder. Exhausted from the events of the night before, Adams was cat-napping peacefully.

He sat up stiffly under Drake's touch and his face reddened.

"Huh?"

"This is where you get out," Jim grinned. "You're going to do some reading this afternoon."

Puffy was dumbfounded. His only association with the printed page was the *Morning Star* and the *Police Gazette*.

"Wait a minute," he protested. "Don't I get a look at that fox?"

Jim piloted him skillfully from the car.

"Look up a book on gems," he said. "I want to know how big the largest diamond was that has been found to date, where it came from, and if they've ever been found in the far north."

Adams gulped, saw that the boss was sincere and started to turn away. Jim halted him.

"After that, go down to police headquarters and see what you can dig up on George Lardner."

Puffy's chin stiffened.

"It'll be dirt," he said. "This boy Lardner comes from an old line of dirty wash. He's the heel of the family shoe."

Jim Drake nodded.

"That's what I figure," he agreed. "But I want all the facts."

Adams pivoted, took one look at the imposing granite building in which he was about to trust his tender body and with a shake of his head mounted the long flight of steps.

Jim Drake stepped hard on the accelerator and sped away toward Wildwood Zoo.

ONCE on the grounds he had little trouble finding the section of open air cages that housed the small animals. Wildwood was built with a complete lack of eye appeal. Down a tarred path he passed through tangled brush and approached a short line of ugly wired cages.

The silver fox was crouching at the rear of the last cage. She stood up as he came near and started to trot slowly back and forth in front of him. Looking around carefully, Drake saw that he was alone. Afternoon crowds had long since deserted this uninteresting section.

His imagination told Drake that there was something feminine about the smooth motions of the animal's body. The black eyes were pleading—Sylvia Fanton's eyes.

"Please," the girl in the car had said. "I must have the fur."

The walk was deserted. He leaned over the fence and said softly.

"Sylvia—Sylvia Fanton."

The fox continued its restless pacing.

Drake doubted his own sanity. If anyone heard him standing here alone, talking to an animal . . . He shook his head in disgust and started to turn away.

From the corner of his eye he caught the sudden flash of smooth, human flesh. Whipping around, eyes wide, Drake was sure that for a fraction of a minute a lovely nude girl appeared in the cage where the fox had been. *It was Sylvia Fanton.* A flash of nude limbs molded breathtakingly, snatched at his breath. Warm pleading eyes, full rich lips that seemed to cry beseechingly.

"Help me. You are the only one . . ."

Then the vision was gone. The silver fox stood silently in its place, head bent forward. Jim Drake suffered all the emotions of a man about to go mad.

He knew it was all a crazy dream, and yet . . . Last night he had been drunk. Now, here in the harsh light of late afternoon it had been so real.

Hurried footsteps crunched loudly on the tar walk. He slipped quickly out of sight into the brush that grew beside the fox cage. Feeling like a fool, Jim waited. The heavy slouching figure of George Lardner heaved into sight. One of the keepers, trimly uniformed, was at his side. They stopped before the cage and engaged in hurried conversation. The keeper nodded several times and Lardner passed him a bill.

"Tonight," Drake heard him say in a low voice. "Make sure it's unlocked."

They were gone up the little incline when he stepped out on the path once more. Drake had been forced to make a decision.

IN SPITE of his addiction to the bottle, Jim Drake's body was hard and supple as he raced toward the car. Digging around in the trunk he brought out a sharp file. Thank God for Puffy Adams and his early safe cracking days. Returning to the cage he made sure no one was about. The door was a strong affair behind the inner building, hidden on the side of the hill. He started to file hurriedly on the Yale that held the bolt in place.

The fox came toward him and sat down patiently just inside the door. Its eyes never left his face as he worked. The curve of the lock separated and with a quick motion he tossed it from him. The animal came out swiftly as he opened the door. It trotted at his heels and they kept to the underbrush, running toward the car.

Pushing the door open with shaking hands, Drake said, "In—quickly, and stay on the floor."

The beautiful animal leaped and settled close to the floor boards. Drake rounded the car and in a minute they were purring swiftly toward the main highway.

From behind him somewhere in Wildwood Zoo, a sharp cry of alarm went up. His theft had been detected. In five minutes the roads to town would be blocked by police patrols.

Jim's forehead wrinkled into tight furrows. The coupe was doing eighty-five. With one hand he reached down and petted the fox's smooth head.

"You snap at me," he warned, "and I'll send you back to your cage."

A warm tongue touched his hand softly.

The police sirens were dying now, and he breathed with relief as they passed the city limits and swept into heavy traffic. Slowing down a little, his forehead smoothed out and a sly smile swept across his face. Fifteen minutes later Drake eased the car into the alley behind the apartment hotel.

There was no one on duty at the freight elevator. With the silver fox in his arms Drake made a hurried entrance and shortly they reached the private floor of his apartment. He placed the animal carefully on the floor and with his key opened the door.

Puffy Adams was stretched across the bed. His eyes opened with a jerk at the sight of Jim's passenger, and he drew himself toward the safety of the far end of the bed.

"Well," Puffy said hesitantly. "If you go for this kind 'a thing it's okay with me. Just keep that four-legged Dracula away from me. No more blood-letting this week, please."

Jim ignored him. He locked the door swiftly and turned on the fox.

"You can come out now," he said. "It's safe here."

THE animal crossed the thick rug with a bound, pounced to the bed

with a stealthy spring and curled into a little ball of fur. Its eyes closed and it was motionless.

"I'll be damned." Drake slouched down in the leather chair beside the cocktail table and dragged out a much smoked pipe. "That's gratitude for you."

Puffy gazed with growing respect and admiration for the faults of the insane.

"I suppose," he suggested, "that you expected that pint-sized bundle of fur to kick one foot, toss off her coat and do a snake dance right here in the bedroom?"

Drake sat motionless. Smoke drifted in lazy circles around his head.

"What about the diamonds?" he asked. "Get any dope?"

Adams edged carefully away from the bed and glided safely away from the sleeping fox. He dipped a slip of paper from his wrinkled pocket and started to read mechanically.

"Largest diamond came from Africa weight one pound and a quarter—didn't get the name of it, because I couldn't pronounce it anyhow." He looked up anxiously. "Is that enough?"

Jim put the pipe away carefully.

"For brevity," he admitted. "It's perfect. But it will do."

"So?"

"From what I saw of that diamond last night," Drake continued, "it must have weighed at least two pounds. Perfectly cut and yet by no one in this country. Puffy, we've a perfectly swell mystery on our hands."

"And the fox?" Adams added, with a suspicious look at the drowsy animal on the bed. "What in hell's bells made you bring it here?"

"George Lardner," Drake said slowly.

"What?"

"Lardner was at the zoo this afternoon," Jim explained. "He paid a large sum of money to make sure he could steal the fox tonight. If Lardner wanted it that bad, what could I lose?"

He didn't mention the sudden vision of Sylvia Fanton he had seen, haunting and lovely in the cage.

"So he thinks Sylvia had the rock?" Puffy's face awakened with new angles.

"So do I," Drake admitted. "At least she knows a lot about it."

He jerked upright suddenly, caught by the sudden movement on the bed. Adams wheeled, his eyes following Jim's.

"Holy Ned!" he shouted. "The girl . . ."

THE silver fox was gone. Sylvia Fanton, more lovely than ever was stretched comfortably across the bed, her slim limbs partly covered by the fox cape. She was real this time. Drake caught the look of gratitude in her eyes.

"Then you *are* real," he went toward her in long strides. "I was beginning to wonder."

She crouched away from him slightly, trying to stretch the short fur to cover her rounded limbs. The task wasn't very successful.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. He knew she *was* sorry. Sorry for all the trouble she had caused him.

"But why . . .?"

She sat up, shielding herself carefully.

"It's very simple," she explained. "I am doomed to wear the body of a fox during those hours when the sun is high. At night . . ." She motioned toward the window with slim fingers.

Drake turned, saw that the sun had drifted behind the distant skyline and darkness had come down on the city. He smiled, only partly understanding.

"At night you become a very lovely woman. I know that much."

Sylvia Fanton blushed.

"Thanks!"

Puffy whistled.

"Leave it to Cinderella Drake," he grinned. "Man, you sure hit the jackpot this time."

Drake sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Please tell us about yourself," he begged. "There's something I should know? Some way I can help?"

She shook her head sadly.

"I'm sorry. I owe you an explanation, and don't think I'm not grateful. More than that I can't tell you now."

"Listen," Jim said. "I may have been drunk last night. Perhaps I'm a mild sort of rotter, but at least I want to try."

The girl shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It may sound foolish, but the success of my mission here depends on myself alone. The lives of many people are hinged on my playing the game alone. The curse that holds me, binds my people also."

Puffy Adams' jaw dropped. He reached for the always ready bottle in the small bar and poured a drink. He swallowed it with a loud gulp.

"George Lardner shares your knowledge," Drake said.

Sylvia's body shuddered under the fur.

"Lardner is a snake." Her voice was as cold as ice. "His greed has destroyed my people. Death will be his reward."

"All of which means," Drake said evenly. "You have recovered the diamond that you held in your hands last night at the Owl Limb."

THE girl arose slowly. The fur draped itself about her body revealing warm shoulders, slim, evenly tapered legs. She stood like something apart from them, small and queenly. Her voice was strained and hurt.

"I cannot say more. You have helped me in the quest of the flaming diamond and you will be rewarded. Now, I must go before I cause your death also."

Jim felt helpless — lost. She had aroused emotions in his heart that had been long buried. Now with stark death and worse threatening her, Sylvia Fanton proposed to leave him forever. He was as her side, his hand clasping the warm wrist tightly.

"Let me help," he begged. "I'm not much on speeches but you're in trouble. I can believe what I have seen. If there is a way of saving you torture, I'm going to do it."

Sylvia stared up at him, tears misting her dark eyes. For a moment he was sure she would throw herself into his arms.

"You're very nice," she said softly. "I'd be grateful forever if you *could* help, but you can't. I know my task and I have others with me who know theirs. It will be best if we never meet again."

Drake's jaw grew stubborn.

"And if I refuse to let you leave?"

The girl's eyes were cold and she twisted the cape around her slim body tightly, wearing it like a queen's robe. Words tumbled from her lips swiftly.

"There is nothing you can do to prevent it."

A worried grin spread over Jim Drake's face.

"If you insist on going," he said, "there isn't much else to say."

"Don't think I'm not grateful to both of you." This time her smile was for Puffy and his chest swelled a good three inches under its influence. "If

you'll promise not to follow me tonight, I'll return here in the morning. If you insist on getting yourselves in trouble on my account there isn't a thing I can do about it without appearing ungrateful."

"That's more like it," Jim said cheerfully. "Now, about your clothes. You can't wear that fur without something under it, although the effect is appealing."

"And revealing," Puffy added.

She blushed.

"Could –could you find something for me. Some of your clothing?"

Puffy Adams chuckled. "With those shoulders Cinderella's got, you'll look like an ex-prizefighter," he warned.

DRAKE started a search in the closet. Ten minutes later Sylvia Fanton made an appealing picture in tan slacks, light jersey sweater and a pair of sport shoes Jim had discarded years ago but had forgotten to throw away. She stood at the door holding the fox fur close to her breast. Then smiling brightly, she tossed it into his arms.

"Take good care of it," she said "If it's not here in the morning . . ."

Drake stood close to her. He couldn't find words for what was in his heart. A dull hurt feeling welled up in his throat. It was so damned futile sending a girl out when he had promised not to follow. If she didn't come back in the morning . . .

Sylvia's eyes grew tender. Standing on tiptoe, she pressed her lips to his stubbled chin.

"You've been up for a long time, laddie," she whispered. "Better shave and get some rest."

The door slammed quickly and she was gone. Drake held the fur carefully over his arm and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I'll be damned," he said.

"So will I," Puffy spoke from somewhere behind him. "Looks like Cinderella Drake is gonna go huntin' for that other slipper, and after all these years."

Jim looked around the room for a safe place to hide the precious silver cape. He decided on the big cedar chest in the open closet. He locked the fur in safely and dropped the key in his pocket.

"Ready for a little traveling?" he asked.

Puffy had discarded his shoes and was stretched out comfortably, a frosted glass in his hand. His chin dropped, jumped forward protestingly.

"Just let's relax," he begged. "I've worn the heels off my feet for you today."

Even as he talked the stout one started to tie the laces of his shoes. They went down the quiet hall and into the private elevator.

"What about George Lardner?" Drake asked as they shot toward the main floor. "Find out his life history?"

"At the police station," Puff admitted. Then in a puzzled voice he added, "all but the last two years of it."

"And those last two years?"

They passed quickly through the rear lobby and into the alley. The car was still where Jim had left it. As they drove out of the narrow alley and into the street, Puffy talked.

"George Lardner has been in every racket the law knows about," he said. "The police have a complete record of him since he cut his eye teeth stealing milk. But the last two years get me."

DRAKE settled down behind the wheel and they headed toward the rush of downtown traffic.

"Don't kill me with the suspense," he said. "What's Lardner been up to

that's so startling?"

"Exploring," Puffy said dryly.

"An expedition to the city's slums?" Drake queried.

"No!" Puffy crossed his legs comfortably and scratching a match on the bottom of his shoe, touched the flame to his cigarette. "I had to go to the Explorer's Club to get the dope on him. Lardner has been spending a lot of time in the Baker Lake district just east of Hudson Bay in Canada."

Drake's foot released its pressure on the gas pedal. "Thought that country was pretty well explored years ago," he said mildly. "Nothing much but snow and ice up there, is there?"

"And maybe diamonds," Puffy said. "At least that's what Lardner and some of the boys at the Explorer's Club think."

Drake's interest was increasing.

"Is that where he found that big gem he displayed at the club the other night?"

Puffy's lips split in a wide, toothy grin.

"Cinderella Drake knows the answers," he admitted. "Yes! That's where he found the diamond and that's how he happened to get in with the stuffed shirts at the Explorer's Club."

Drake was silent.

Adams hesitated, then added,

"Lardner showed up there six months ago claiming he had found the world's largest diamond. He claimed he got it from a secret valley somewhere in the Baker Lake district."

"Fantastic!" They had reached their destination and Drake pulled the coupe in smoothly to the curb. The lights over the door of the Owl Limb Night Club were darkened.

"The Explorer's Club doesn't think so. They are mighty stirred up about his find. The only thing that puzzles them is how come the stone is cut. Lardner refuses to tell them who did the job. As for finding it where he did, it seems they've had an idea there were diamonds in that country and were just waiting for someone to prove it."*

JIM DRAKE knew all he wanted to for the time being. He turned toward the unlighted marquee of the Owl Limb.

"Looks as though the police closed the place up," Puffy said soberly. "Gonna stay sober tonight?"

"Do you know where that check room girl lives; the one you call Mary?" Drake asked.

Puffy's face sobered.

"She's married and has three kids," he said. "I don't know where any married women live."

Jim chuckled. He twisted the car into the traffic again, and with a swift U-turn, headed the coupe toward home.

"Just the same I need information from a married woman," he said. "And you're getting out at the next corner in a perhaps futile effort to find Mary."

"And if her husband doesn't meet me at the door with a shotgun," Puffy asked, "what do I ask her?"

Jim shot an appraising look toward

* Professor Hobbs of the University of Michigan has found several small diamonds and diamond particles in the strata of the glacial flow throughout certain northern states.

Hobbs, a careful and painstaking research worker, used his knowledge of geology to trace the strata of the glacial flow. He determined several years ago that the diamonds came from the north, somewhere in the Hudson Bay area. Although his co-workers are confident that he is correct, a rush of prospectors failed to find anything that would prove his theory.

Although opinions among geologists vary, many believe in Hobbs and his work. A consulting gem expert at the world famous Field Museum put forth this story to your editor, and convinced him that Hobbs is a clear headed expert who knows what he is talking about. Somewhere under the waste of snow, probably a little east of Hudson Bay, there is a fortune in uncovered diamonds. A fortune that could easily eclipse the yield of Africa's richest diamond fields.—Ed.

the deserted corner ahead, whipped the coupe up beside a traffic officer and opened the door.

"From now on," he said, "we are interested in Lardner. He's a busy man these days. Mary ought to know where her boss is. Women like that have an idea of everything that is going on. Find out where Lardner went and meet me at the apartment as soon as you can."

Puffy was already on the sidewalk.

"Leave it to me, Cinderella," he said. "I get the idea. If you can't follow the fox, you're gonna follow the wolf and let him lead you to her."

Drake nodded and smiled after the sturdy figure with a growing respect.

"Move along there!" The gruff voice came from his side. "Can't be holding traffic all night for you."

Drake turned, saw the officer grinning at him, and shot into the traffic.

* * *

THE door of the apartment was ajar. The puzzled expression on Jim Drake's face changed to one of worried interest. He pushed the door open swiftly, and silently. The lights were out. A sound came from the direction of the window and straining he thought he saw the curtain blow in slightly. On tiptoe he went swiftly around the side of the big room. The chair by the bed had been moved and he struck his shin on it in the dark.

The room flashed white as he pressed the electric button. Hot anger passed through his body. Every piece of furniture in the room had been tipped upside down. Linings were torn from the chairs. His clothing was heaped in an ugly pile in the middle of the floor. Drawers were pulled out and emptied.

The fur! He ran swiftly to the closet, twisted the handle and breathed a sigh of relief. The cedar chest was broken and splintered around the lock, but the cover hadn't been lifted. He inserted the key quickly and drew out the fur cape. Its rich depth felt more precious than ever in his fingers. Here in his hands was the link to his first real love affair.

A footstep sounded faintly behind him. His heart was in his throat. Drake whipped around and sprang to his feet. He stared straight into the barrel of a wicked automatic. Lifting his eyes slowly, he studied the man who held the weapon.

The stranger's face was hard as stone, almost barbaric. His bronze skin stretched tightly over firm, high cheek bones. The mouth was open slightly in a determined way. Teeth that flashed like an uneven row of pearls seemed half savage, yet not unfriendly.

"You will come toward me slowly," the man's voice was cultured, yet hesitant, as though he hadn't spoken English for many years. "A false move will destroy you."

He backed away toward the center of the room.

"How . . . where?" Drake stammered.

"You forgot to examine the bath," the gunman said. "You are not a painstaking young man, Jim Drake."

Jim started. The man knew his name, held a gun on him that threatened immediate death, and yet his voice was friendly, ever courteous.

"I have nothing here that you want," Drake said.

HE STOOD in the middle of the room now. The stranger reached down carefully with one hand, still holding his aim. He twisted a chair upright and sat down. For the first time Drake had a chance to look him over more carefully. His eyes were the same deep black as Sylvia Fanton's. Cold and yet somehow gentle.

"You are holding in your hand what I need more than anything in the world." The man relaxed but the gun didn't waver. Drake sat down opposite him on the edge of the bed.

"The fur?" he asked.

"The fox fur." The gun settled on the strange intruder's knee and he leaned forward eagerly. "Give it to me at once. If I leave with it now, you will be troubled no more. This is as our mistress demands."

Then Sylvia Fanton had sent him. He must be one of the henchmen she had spoken of. At once Drake felt relieved. He pushed the fur away from him slowly, hating to part with it. The man stood up, took it with his free hand and held it tightly.

"You are very wise," he said slowly.

He started to back toward the window.

"Wait," Drake was on his feet, "Sylvia promised to return in the morning. Why . . .?"

A look of compassion spread across the gunman's face.

"Sylvia Fanton is no more," he said pityingly. "You had but a brief glimpse of an earthly woman who is the most perfect creation on earth. Now she has completed her mission and will return to her people."

"Then you did get the diamond?" Drake was sorry at once that he had spoken. The man's eyes turned icy.

"We have done what we came to do," he said shortly. "We appreciate the part you played in our success. More than that, I am not at liberty to discuss. Please do not follow me as I leave."

Then, carefully,

"Make no mistake, Mr. Drake. Our queen came very close to deserting her sacred trust. If you were to see her again, you would not enjoy the same close association. There is no place in her life for you, or you would be going with me instead of staying here at the point of a gun."

Drake moved forward hesitantly, and then stopped with the gesture of a man who knows he is beaten.

"Okay," he admitted. "You've got me on the spot. But remember this: George Lardner thinks more of that diamond than he does his life. He's going to leave a trail of blood in every country of the world, but he'll get it if you don't kill him first."

The gunman's face was a mask of hatred.

"Do not underestimate the power Lardner is fighting," he said grimly. "There will be blood, yes. It will be Lardner's blood. He has a debt to pay, and it is not our wish that you be involved when payment is made. Our leader whom you know as Sylvia Fanton has one message for you. Goodbye."

He tossed a small envelope of paper at Jim's feet and was gone through the window as silently as a floating cloud.

JIM stood speechless for a second, then he went toward the window and looked down the long line shadow of the fire escape. There was no one in sight. A small dog darted along the edge of the alley far below. Or was it a dog? His bewildered mind told him the animal was more like a fox in its quick, sly movements.

Drake picked up the slip of paper in shaking fingers. He opened it and stared at the neat longhand message:

We were very close to love, Jim Drake. Love is not good for a woman who has my obligations.

The outer door rattled noisily. Drake took a second quick look at the note and stuffed it into his pocket. Puffy Adams stormed in and stopped abruptly with a shocked look in his eyes.

"Been havin' a party?" he asked whimsically. "Looks like the guests came on a whirlwind."

Drake was silent. He started to rearrange the room mechanically. Duffy collected the clothing from the floor and replaced it in the closet. The boss would talk when he got ready.

From the chair by the cocktail table, Drake said suddenly, "What about Lardner? Did Mary know where he went?"

Puffy, his job completed, slumped across the bed.

"That guy Lardner is off an another trip." He started to slip his shoes off, thought better of it, and tied the laces again. "Mary says he gave the employes all a month's pay and said he'd be back in time to keep them in cash next month."

Through a cloud of pipe smoke, Drake was placing more pieces into the jigsaw of Sylvia Fanton's life.

"Any idea where he's going?" he asked.

Puffy shook his head.

"Not the slightest," he admitted. "Mary says her boss is tighter than a bum's pocketbook when it comes to information."

Drake had enough pipe smoke. He put it away carefully and stood up.

"I see you didn't get the shoes off after all," he said a little slyly. "Going somewhere?"

Puffy arose, took a suitcase from the closet shelf and started tossing clothing into it.

"I think so," he said grimly. "If I'm half as good a stooge as I think I am, we'll be needing overcoats before we get back."

Drake was already waiting at the door when his companion lifted the heavy bag to his shoulder and prepared to follow.

"Got your long underwear?" he asked soothingly. "We're going to the airport first, but after that I've got a hunch we'll go diamond prospecting somewhere east of Hudson Bay."

Puffy shivered.

"Cinderella Drake hunts the silver slipper." His voice was doubtful, his eyes were twinkling. "If you find it up there, you'll freeze your foot trying the damned thing on."

* * *

THE Municipal Airport was deserted, save for a small group of men waiting just outside the main lobby. They were obviously the members of a dance band. Instruments were packed and waiting on the baggage truck outside as Drake and Puffy entered. Drake went straight to the ticket window. The man behind the ticket cage looked up with a smile as he approached. His eyes were tired and questioning.

"Yes, sir?" in quiet friendliness.

Drake tossed a roll of bills on the counter.

"We're thinking of taking the night plane to Winnipeg," he said indecisively. "Any empty berths?"

The clerk grinned.

"Fortunately for you," he said, "there aren't any priority passengers tonight. The Winnipeg job has been full of flyers headed for the Canadian border for the past two weeks. Nothing of importance tonight. Five berths available."

Drake looked around curiously.

"Have you a passenger named George Lardner?" he asked.

The clerk took down a small file and thumbed through it. He shook his head.

"No. Had you planned to meet him here?"

Drake smiled.

"We had a date," he admitted. "George Lardner is headed for the

same destination. He'll no doubt catch a later plane and meet us in Winnipeg."

The clerk was penning figures rapidly across the ticket.

"You won't lack for entertainment," he laughed in a low voice. "That gang at the door call themselves Harry's Rhythm Rascals. Headed for a dance job up there."

"I'd rather have a quiet berth," Drake admitted. "Need sleep more than I need rhythm."

The clerk collected the two fares and said sleepily,

"Your plane will take off in twenty minutes, sir. May as well get aboard. The berths are made up."

"Thanks." Drake pocketed the tickets and motioned for Adams to follow. As they passed Harry's Rhythm Rascals, Drake watched one of the men turn slowly and follow him.

"That guy must be the tuba player," Puffy said quickly. "He sure looks as though he'd been pushed around."

The luggage was disposed of and in ten minutes Drake was lying quietly under the dome of the plane. A sudden throb of motors came from up ahead. With half closed eyes he wondered, if at the end of this mad journey, Sylvia Fanton might be waiting for him. George Lardner wouldn't be far away. Although the plane trip had started like a wild goose chase, at least he was headed in the general direction of trouble, and the grandest girl he had ever met. Turning restlessly on one side, he was aware that the bumpy ground was no longer under the plane and the three great motors were purring smoothly as they drifted ahead through the starlit night.

* * *

"JIM!—Jim!" Drake opened one eye with effort, remembered that he was in a plane bound for Winnipeg, and sat up. Through the parted curtain he could see the dark earth underneath sprinkled occasionally with a handful of twinkling lights. Puffy Adams was leaning over the berth, his body clad in oversized pajamas, eyes wide with excitement.

"The orchestra!" Puffy was muttering. "They ain't! They're Lardner's gunmen! Lardner's on board!" He babbled on.

"Wait a minute!" Drake was wide awake now. He helped Adams into the berth, holding a warning finger over his lips. "Now," he said firmly, "one thing at a time."

"Those punks that called themselves Harry's Rhythm Rascals. They got a plane full of tommy guns. They can't play but *one* tune on those."

Drake's eyes narrowed.

"How did you find out?"

"I couldn't sleep," Puffy said. "Went up front to get a glass of water and find that pretty hostess to keep me company."

"So?"

Puffy gulped.

"So she isn't aboard the plane. We landed somewhere last night right after we took off. I didn't think nothin' of it. Ain't used to these airplanes. Well, when I was up front I heard two of these punks talkin' in their berths."

He opened the curtain slightly and looked both ways along the narrow aisle.

"This whole damned plane is full of Lardner's men. They were laughing at the trick they pulled on the airlines. Seems they forced the pilot to land, threw out both pilots and the hostess. Lardner was waiting at the private field and he came aboard."

"You're sure Lardner's on this plane?" Drake asked. "You didn't dream all this?"

"Listen, Cinderella." Puffy was him-

self again. This sky bird is headquarters for every ex-con in Chicago. I don't know why they didn't throw us off with the hostess, but I sure wish they had."

A hard smile twisted Drake's lips.

"I think," he said, "that we're going to see Sylvia Fanton much sooner than I had planned. Unless we do some fast thinking we may not see her alive."

THEY sat quietly as Drake studied the country under the plane. He tried to discover some landmark listed on the map. There was nothing but scarred, snowcapped mountain peaks. A sprinkling of toothpick pines relieved the monotony of blinding snow, here and there. Gradually, as the plane droned on, even these were left behind. Ahead—only the white wastes.

From somewhere forward in the plane came a hard chuckle of laughter.

"Our hosts are coming to life," Drake said. "It's now or never." He pushed bare feet into the aisle and dropped, stretching his arms overhead with a yawn.

"As soon as I'm out of sight," he whispered, "get back to your berth and dress. I'll see you in the cabin ahead. Act as though you know nothing. Understand?"

Puffy grinned sadly.

"That'll be easy," he answered, "but I've been around those violins that talk death before. Don't like a tommy gun unless it's in my own hands."

"Okay," Drake said grimly. "Keep your mouth shut and you may get your wish."

He slipped into his shoes, dressing quickly, went toward the tiny wash room halfway up the aisle. One of Lardner's men was making a hurried exit. They met, heads down, with a jarring blow. The gunman started to swear loudly, caught himself and said in a mock pleasant voice,

"Good morning. Say, ain't this a darb of a trip?"

Drake nodded.

"Guess I'll splash a little water over my face if you're done."

The man's heavy face lighted in an embarrassed smile. He stepped hurriedly to one side.

"Oh—oh sure. The sink's all yours."

Once inside, Drake locked the door quickly. He washed the sleepiness from his eyes. So the laugh was on him after all. Lardner was in control of the ship, and headed for the lost Flaming Diamond. Where, Drake wondered, did he and Puffy Adams fit into the picture?

Suddenly there was a difference in the tune the motors were humming. The plane slanted down at an abrupt angle and Drake pitched forward against the wall. Struggling up, he heard a sharp knock at the door.

"Better strap yourself into a seat," a strange voice carried through the wall, muffled and far away.

He turned the lock quickly, lurched out, and felt an automatic in the small of his back.

"Hey!" Drake feigned surprise. "What the hell?"

"Never mind, buddy," the man gave him a sharp push toward the cabin, "get yourself strapped in. We ain't got time to tell stories."

A sharp prod of the gun settled the argument. Silently Drake went forward. Puffy was already in his seat, his face an expressionless mask.

"Remember," he whispered, "keep your chin stiff and wait for a break. The fun has really started."

THE plane had dropped and leveled off. Lardner's men seemed to have forgotten their captives in the excitement. They sat with faces glued to the

windows, watching curiously as George Lardner at the controls brought them down in ever tightening circles toward the valley below.

Adams nudged his companion.

"Look at 'em," he whispered. "The rattiest looking bunch of bums I've ever seen. What in hell does Lardner need so many guns for?"

"To finish murdering a race of people," Drake answered coldly. "A job that he started when he found the Flaming Diamond. If he has a chance, he'll finish the task to get it back again."

"Shut up, back there!" A lean, sharp nosed individual in the seat ahead turned slightly. "No talk now. You'll have plenty of chance later on."

A ripple of hard laughter went through the cabin.

George Lardner was an expert pilot. More than that, he was familiar with the country over which they were flying. Realizing that any attempt to escape now would be futile, Drake tried to memorize the layout of the small valley into which Lardner seemed to be heading.

With the entire country a white layer of blowing snow it was difficult to make out the sharp walls of granite that arose from the cup-shaped hole below. It was like a huge bomb crater, perhaps ten miles across. On the valley bottom was the smoothly swept blue-green of a frozen lake.

The plane banked abruptly and Lardner cut the motors. Drake felt the tenseness mount within the cabin. A fear was filling these State Street gunmen that had never troubled them before. The motors were silent. The ship dropped below the lip of the canyon wall and the wind died smoothly. Circling, Lardner gunned the motors again and roared in straight over the strip of frozen ice.

Try as he might Drake could see no sign of life or human habitation. Heavy fir trees came straight to the edge of the lake, standing guard stiff and frozen.

The plane zoomed up sharply and cut back over the lake leaving a black shadow against the ice. It sank down, bounced gently and rolled ahead. They went straight toward the high cliff at the far end of the lake.

"This guy better know what he's doing." Puffy clutched the chair ahead and held on grimly. "Or we'll crack up like a broken match against that wall."

Drake was silent. A murmur of anxious voices arose about them. They still rolled swiftly toward the cliff. Lardner seemed to make no attempt to cut speed. The plane took the bump at the edge of the lake, and then Drake saw the cavern ahead. It was huge and black, cut at an angle in the surface of the rock. A sudden blur of rock walls and they were in the darkness of the cave. The plane settled back roughly on its shock absorbers and stopped. Lights flashed on within the cabin.

GEORGE LARDNER pushed through the small communication door between the pilot's cabin and the waiting gangsters. As he came, he jerked the helmet and goggles from his eyes. A hard smile on his heavy face left no doubt as to his frame of mind.

"Hello, Drake," the mouth a mask of expressionless hate. "I take my hat off to you. Never gave Cindrella Drake credit for being anything but a whiskey mill."

Jim stood up slowly, knowing these minutes might be his last. Fear was in his heart. Not for himself, but for the doom that faced Sylvia Fanton unless she could be warned of Lardner's coming. There was no doubt in Jim Drake's mind that this frozen valley was the home of the fox people and their queen.

Lardner wasn't the soft night club owner now. The man was short and stocky, but with bulging arms that were tensed for action. The dark face was filled with devilish purpose.

"I'd like to know why we weren't thrown out of the plane last night with the others?" Drake said quietly.

"Oh! That?" Lardner chuckled. "I knew you were headed toward this valley and I thought you'd appreciate the lift."

"For your information," Drake answered coolly, "we took the plane for Winnipeg. Where we are now I haven't the slightest idea."

George Lardner started toward the outer door. He whipped around savagely, his face twisted into a hateful grimace.

"All right, play boy," he snapped. "You asked for it. Now it's my turn. I know you helped Sylvia Fanton to escape. I know you had a part in stealing the diamond, and I also know you are in love with the girl. That, if you'll have the truth, is why you are with us now."

A hissing sigh escaped Puffy Adams' lips. He was beginning to understand now why Lardner had not shot them both long ago.

"So I am to act as decoy," Drake said. "If you think I'll let you torture that girl, you're a madman."

Lardner ignored him. He pushed the outer door of the cabin open and dropped heavily to the cave floor.

"Unpack your stuff, boys," he ordered crisply. "And keep an eye on our guests. I want them to be safe and comfortable."

The gangsters closed in, and some of them started for the baggage compartment.

A ring of steel closed about the pair.

"Out, quick," one of the plug uglies mumbled. "And don't try to get away."

TO DRAKE'S surprise the cave was warm, as though heated from some vast, hidden source of fire. Lardner was well ahead of them, going cautiously down the long tunnel. A flashlight sent its beam ahead of his outstretched hand. The baggage was handed down quickly and tommy guns came into sight from the instrument cases. They were smoothly polished and glistened under the dull light of lanterns. They followed Lardner slowly down the vast hall that led under the lip of the mountain. It was warmer and more humid now.

"The boss knows what he's doing," a voice said behind Drake. "These fox people can't do us any harm during the day. By night we'll be ready to blast them down in short order."

Unable to speak to Puffy, Drake was thinking plenty. If they went on to wherever the tunnel led them, it would be too late to face Lardner with any show of force. Drake knew that Sylvia Fanton would be caught off guard if she were here. Could he raise some sort of alarm?

The man at his side seemed a trifle sleepy and disinterested in what was going on. Making sure the man's gun was pointed away where he wouldn't jerk the trigger, Drake lifted an arm high, pointing toward the dark roof of the cave. Pretending fright, he shouted:

"Oh my God! Look!"

Before Lardner could control them, two men had raised their guns and sent salvos of lead screaming into the darkness. Lardner's voice, ahead in the shaft, shattered the silence that followed with wild oaths.

"Who the hell did that?" He stormed back toward Drake, but Jim was well satisfied with what he had done. The sound would carry for miles into the base of the mountain. If Sylvia or her people were here . . .

From far down the shaft a faint bark echoed clearly. It was the bark of a fox, followed in quick succession by more of the same sounds.

George Lardner faced him, neck red and arms akimbo.

"You're getting too damned clever for your own good," he shouted. "I oughta' knock some of the cockiness out of you."

Drake had a slow temper. But behind the Cindrella Drake who had soused himself so thoroughly in Lardner's whiskey still lurked the keen eyed air patrol cadet who had only six months ago put his body through every air battle on the west coast. Some of the old strength and nerve were coming back now. Coming with a rush of hot blood to his head.

Puffy Adams had sworn he'd stick by Drake until that spirit returned. Now, ringed in by steel death, Adams' face lighted with interest. Yet, he realized that Drake had small chance against these bums.

The cave was dead silent again. Lardner breathed hard, crouched like an oversized wrestler about to spring.

DRAKE'S face was suddenly cold, emotionless.

"If your men weren't ready to shoot me down the minute I move," he said slowly, "I'd pound you within an inch of your rotten life."

Lardner's face lighted slowly and a sardonic grin crossed his face.

"Talk big, play boy," he urged. "I don't need lead to put you out of the way."

Drake's slim body shot forward with the suddenness of a catapult. His shoulders were low as they struck Lardner's thick belly. Caught off guard, Lardner's heavy, ape arms twisted about Jim's waist and he started to crush Drake's body against his own. With a quick twist Drake was loose, dodging backward as a light left caught Lardner on the chest. Lardner jumped in quickly, puffing hard. His right arm swept out and brought blood to Drake's nose.

The slim air cadet shook his head, feeling the sting on his face. He brushed an arm across his nose, and felt warm blood on his fingers. This time Drake went in low, caught Lardner with his left hand just above the belt. The big man bent over with a grunt as Drake's right climbed under his chin like a looping Spitfire. Jim Drake's right fist went home with the entire impact of his shoulder behind it. He felt a twinge of pain shoot through his arm as Lardner's head swept backward with a jerk. The fat man stumbled and sat down abruptly. He looked surprised and frightened, shaking his head back and forth like an angry bull.

"You dirty . . ." Lardner didn't attempt to rise. His face was flaming red. "Shoot the legs out from under him."

A tommy came up swiftly, trained on Drake.

"Hold it!" A harsh, almost frightened voice came from the shadows by the wall.

Puffy Adams stood, back to the granite, sweeping a tommy gun around on the gang of men. His trigger finger was poised easily, the gun slung carelessly in the curve of his arm. His voice, frightened for Drake, became cool as he saw the last gun drop toward the floor.

"One shot," he said, "and I'll poke enough lead into your boss to keep you rats from ever flying anywhere again."

Drake was at his side now.

"How did you manage it?" he whispered.

"Black-jack," Puffy grinned. "They were interested in you. It wasn't hard."

GEORGE LARDNER was frightened. The tommy gun was aimed at his head and he knew Puffy Adams wouldn't hesitate when the time came to shoot. He sat up slowly, eyes on the pair by the wall. Then like a shot he rolled quickly over and over into the darkness beyond the lighted area. His voice, harsh and powerful shouted.

"Get them, quick!"

A hail of lead swept the air over his head as Puffy jerked backward.

"It's the firing squad," Adams shouted. He dropped to one knee and opened up wide.

Lardner was snarling something unintelligible. Guns swept around on the men by the wall. Then from within the circle of men compressed hell broke loose. Someone was opening up a deadly fire from within the ranks. Gunmen screamed in pain and turned their guns in every direction, trying to determine who had betrayed them.

"Run for it, Drake. Down the tunnel."

The voice was vaguely familiar. Drake didn't hesitate. He clutched Adams' arm and together they dashed into the blackness ahead. From behind them, the sound of gun shots ceased. Only loud groans of pain drifted to them as they went forward through the midnight blackness. Then, far behind, single footsteps followed them hesitantly.

Lardner was still alive. Drake had heard him curse softly as they passed him. He felt blood on Puffy's arm.

"You're hurt," he said quietly. "Where did it hit?"

"Just a nick." Puffy sounded game. "Glanced off the shoulder. A bit of shirt will fix it up. Say! That was a nice poke you took at Lardner."

THE tunnel grew wider. Far ahead a pale shower of colored light tossed against the walls like a weak rainbow. There wasn't a sound ahead or behind them. Drake led the way swiftly. The light seemed stronger, drawing them toward its source.

Then they stood on the edge of a great chamber. From the walls of the circular room a barbaric curtain of rainbowed color sprayed down toward its center.

It flashed and changed as they watched with wide eyes, changing into rich shades of purple, gold, orchid and startling the eye with its everchanging spectrum.

In the direct center of the chamber on a raised dais stood the huge carved statue of a marble polar bear. It towered ten feet high, a magnificent standing beast with lifted outstretched paw. On the back of the bear a small throne had been carved. The blinding flood of color that converged on the throne, hid anything that might be seated there.

Drake clutched his companion's arm.

"Look!"

He pointed toward the low pit that surrounded the statue.

Puffy nodded.

"The biggest fox farm in the world," he said dryly. "Or I'm going nuts."

As their eyes grew accustomed to the changing light, the pit grew clear. The animals became visible against the floor of the pit. There were thousands of them lying about the chamber. They spread over the floor carpeting it with rich fur like a deep rug of precious black and silver.

One thing held Jim Drake spellbound. Every animal had its head lifted toward the throne atop the bear's back.

His eyes lifted again slowly. His vision broke through the bright haze of light. Stretched out in sleep across the stony back was the perfect nude figure of a girl. She seemed frozen

in death, yet the bronzed flesh was alive and throbbing. It was the same girl he had saved from Wildwood Zoo —*Sylvia Fanton!*

HE TRIED to take his eyes away from the vision but could not. Color seemed to splash and caress her body as though it alone gave her the power to exist. Then he knew what it was that made her look human. The light preserved her body during daylight hours, or she would have been forced to enter the body of a fox and mingle in the pit with her own kind.

A queen, Queen of the Flaming Diamond, doomed to lie dead until she could be restored to her normal life.

"What do we do now?" Puffy asked in a tense whisper.

"What I want to know first," Drake said wonderingly, "is who saved us from Lardner's mob?"

"Whoever it was," Adams offered, "he'll never escape them alive."

Soft footsteps came from behind them.

"But you are wrong!"

Drake pivoted, and faced the same man whom he had met in the apartment that night he lost the fur. The man who brought his last message from Sylvia Fanton.

"You see," the man went on quietly, "I am not your enemy. I asked you to stay out of this, but I could not desert you."

Drake's face was lighted in a relieved smile. His hand gripped the other's.

"Now you have saved our life, why did you do it?"

"Because," the man said simply, "you are human and you are good. Sylvia Fanton asked me to help you, and I am her brother."

Puffy Adams sat down abruptly on the cave floor.

"And I," he said unbelievingly, "am the keeper of Cinderella Drake, the sap who still looks for the silver slipper."

"But Sylvia is no fox woman," Drake protested. "She's too warm, too human!"

For a moment there was silence. Then a warm smile lighted the stranger's eyes.

"We are all human," he said. "We are early settlers who came to this valley and sought its sanctuary. Only the curse of George Lardner has spoiled our paradise and driven us into animal form. Perhaps you will see . . ."

HE LOOKED hurriedly at the light that was growing dimmer above them. The rainbow had faded swiftly and darkness was coming down on the cavern.

"I am Silvaris, King of the Fox People," he said swiftly. "On the Flaming Diamond depends our ability to exist. Night is almost upon us again, but unless the diamond can be restored to the paw of the bear, there will be no more night or day."

"But you have it!" Drake protested. "Lardner came here to get it back again . . ."

"Lardner came by mistake to this valley six months ago," Silvaris said brokenly. "We welcomed him as we welcome all people. He betrayed our trust and stole our life source. We took him to our hearts as Sylvia and I were taken many years ago."

"Then you aren't really of the same race?" Drake's voice was filled with relief.

Silvaris shook his head.

"We are here by our own choice," he went on. "Sylvia and I, lost children, found our way here from a trapper's cabin when we were very young. We never tried to leave. When Lardner stole our precious gem, she and I alone knew the ways of civilization.

It was our task to return the stone to its rightful place."

"If that diamond is the solution of this mess," Puffy asked in a puzzled voice, "why don't we clean up the mystery right now?"

"Wait!"

Silvaris went slowly down the long steps to the fox pit. He climbed the steps to the side of the polar bear and his sister's lifeless body. From her armpit, he took a huge gem. As he came toward them, Drake knew it was the Lardner stone, flashing and alive in the semi-darkness.

He pushed it into Drake's hands.

"Somehow Lardner pawned a paste imitation of the real Flaming Diamond off on us that night in Chicago," Silvaris said sadly. "The real stone is the only gem that will make the transformation."

Drake examined the diamond curiously.

"Hey!" Puffy said excitedly. "Wait a minute. How come Lardner is so almighty hot after us, if he thinks we've only got a paste?"

"That I cannot explain," Silvaris admitted helplessly. "I purposely disguised myself to mingle with his men. He came to destroy us and yet he knows our life is short now that the diamond is gone. We cannot live long as animals."

FAR away toward the mouth of the tunnel came the sound of an idling motor. Drake sprang into action.

"I think," he said, "that we can outplay Lardner at whatever game he's playing. He must be wounded. Perhaps too badly to fly."

The face of Silvaris, the Fox King, lightened.

"You are a pilot?" he asked.

Puffy chuckled.

"Cinderella can fly the blind spots off a Jap Zero," he said. "Just strap a pair of wings on him."

They charged toward the mouth of the tunnel. A few hundred feet from the entrance Drake stopped. He picked up a tommy gun where it had been dropped by the fleeing gunmen. Going forward more slowly they saw three men at the entrance, guns pointed into the darkness.

On one knee, Drake fingered the trigger. He picked up a large rock with his free hand and tossed it ten feet to one side. It struck with a loud thump. Immediately red fire cut loose around the place where the rock had hit. Drake brought his finger back lightly against the trigger and watched coldly as the men went down. They pitched forward like alley pins, bleeding and screaming with the pain. There was no time to lose.

Dropping the gun he went forward swiftly, whipping an automatic from his pocket as he ran. Then, seeing Lardner, he took a head dive into the deep snow as the vicious crack of lead whizzed over his head. He rolled over silently coming to his feet with a bound. Lardner, waiting by the plane, shot again and the lead burned into Drake's shoulder. He sprang forward as Lardner's foot lifted toward the open door to the cabin.

Clutching his foot, Drake jerked the man back into the snow with all his strength and they rolled into a white, seething mass of fury. With a short, terrifying blow on the chin he snapped the man's head backward. It twitched queerly and his eyes bulged. Lardner's neck was twisted to one side, stiff and broken.

"The diamond?" Puffy was at his side. Jim Drake bent over the dying man, watched his face as it twitched in pain.

"You want the girl," Lardner

croaked. "You'll never get her. Even with the diamond, you'll never . . ."

His body relaxed suddenly, as though deflated of life. Drake pushed him back into the drifted snow, a look of disgust in his cold eyes.

* * *

"GIVE me that paste imitation," Drake said. "Perhaps somehow . . . ?"

Silvaris nodded helplessly.

"It's of no use," he groaned. "We tried, but it has no power."

Puffy, a knife in his hand once more, was working slowly over the gem with its keen blade. His face was solemn and deep with interest. In spite of themselves, the two men stood close to him watching the thin, case-like stuff that he peeled away from the surface.

"This ain't paste," he said excitedly. "It's a kind of silicate. Lardner must have dipped the gem into it and let the stuff harden as a protective cover."

Drake took the gem eagerly.

"Then he realized that whatever the power was that this stone has, it couldn't work unless the diamond itself was clean and unprotected."

The late afternoon sun was fading slowly beyond the far end of the frozen lake. They turned and went into the cave of the Fox People. Perhaps the gem would work. But if it didn't, Lardner had died with the secret on his lips.

"You'll never get her," he had said, *"even with the diamond."*

At the edge of the pit they stopped. Silvaris spoke in a faraway, silencing voice.

"Our lives depend on you. I am no longer able to control myself. In a few hours we will all be dead . . ."

He hesitated and the voice trailed off into nothingness. Before their eyes the man fell away into a light mist. Instead, a large fox stood at Drake's feet, tail drooping and its eyes staring ahead dully. Silvaris the Fox King had returned to the stature of his people.

The chamber grew silent as death. The fox turned slowly and walked down the steps into the marble pit. He mixed quickly with the others and no movement came from below. The spot of color over the throne wavered and went out. The cave was black as pitch.

"Now or never," Drake muttered. His tongue was rough and dry. His hands shook under the weight of the diamond. It and it alone seemed alive and glittering in the cold unnatural tomb of the cave.

HE WENT toward the bottom of the pit and gently forced his way through the sleeping animals. Up toward the throne his legs carried him step by step, and each step was a million years. A torture of uncertainty and hope.

He lifted the diamond and without hesitation pushed it with all his strength into the outstretched claws of the marble bear.

The Flaming Diamond suddenly glittered more powerfully than ever before. The claws seemed to grasp it tightly, as though the power of the gem must stay where it could never be stolen again.

Bright flames of every hue sprang from the surfaces of the stone. They bathed his body like colored lightning and he fell backward down the steps, his arm upraised in protection. The place came alive with sound. Pealing, silvery tones of rich bell-like music tore the air asunder and the light of the diamond flashed warmly against the flesh of the girl on the throne.

On his feet now Drake stumbled toward Puffy Adams at the entrance of the chamber. Puffy was on his knees, face blinded with the light.

"Holy Ned," he shouted. "Now look what you've done, Cinderella."

Drake didn't answer. His eyes had grown accustomed to the glare. The chamber was hot and brilliant with some new world born from the cold womb of the old. Men and women arose from where animals had been waiting for the end.

Silvaris, the Fox King, came toward them. His face was alight with thanksgiving. Looking over his shoulder, Drake saw something that made him lose all interest in the others. Something that he had prayed for was taking place atop the polar bear's throneback.

Sylvia Fanton, her body alive and glowing, sat upright. No false modesty marred the perfect, classically molded body. She slipped down from the beast's back and caressed its side with slim fingers. Then she came toward him slowly.

THE men and women parted as she went among them gracefully. Her eyes were wide and wonderfully warm as she came up the steps toward him. Her gaze never wavered from his. They had changed from a cold black to soft, gold-flecked brown.

"I knew you would come," she said softly. "It was necessary that we have each other."

With a happy sob she was in his arms. He only knew that her body was pressed tightly to his. That the warmth of the Flaming Diamond had brought her life, and that Jim Drake would never be lonely again.

Voices arose happily in the chamber. The heat, now, was almost unbearable. He heard Silvaris's voice say happily:

"It is good that the Ice Gods have played their part."

Strong arms were on Drake's shoulder. He stumbled after the men toward the open valley. Then, with his emotions under control, he saw the transformation that had taken place because he had done his job well.

"You have once more breathed life into a lost valley," Silvaris was at his side. "We will be forever thankful."

Drake looked down at the wisp of loveliness at his side. She was partly clothed now in a small fur jacket. Somehow it displayed rather than enshrouded her charms.

Away toward the head of the lake frozen cliffs jutted up to the sky from green, lush fields of deep grass. The valley had come suddenly alive. Trees waved gently under the warm wind that rushed from the cave. Small cabins were visible where they had been brought to life from under the deep snow. Deep flower-splashed meadows crept to the water's edge and the ice of the lake was gone. This, he realized with a lump in his throat, was the magic power of the Flaming Diamond.

"The plane is ready," Silvaris reminded him. "It is best that you leave while my people will let you. They are very grateful."

Jim Drake looked questioningly at the girl. Her eyes answered his with a smile. As much as she loved the Fox People, her place was with him.

They went slowly toward the waiting plane.

* * *

DRAKE looked back once as he sent the big ship skimming along the meadow at the far end of the lake. Silvaris and his people were gathered in a tight, worshipping little group, watching the bird plane take to the air.

At three thousand feet he leveled off. Something soft and warm brushed his cheek. He turned and saw Sylvia's eyes close to his, warm and promising.

The valley was no longer visible. From the air one could see only vast

sweeps of snow and ice. The secret of the Fox People was well hidden.

"Well," Puffy said from behind them, "Tiffany will never see another diamond to equal that one."

"Everyone is happy," Drake answered.

Adams chuckled.

"Cinderella Drake found the silver slipper after all," he said. "And man, what a queen there was in it."

Sylvia blushed prettily.

"I'll try to dress a little more modestly in civilization," she offered.

"Not for me," Drake urged. "When a man comes home from a hard day's work shooting down Japs, he likes to see as much of his wife as possible. Namely, in a very small fox fur."

"Yea!" Puffy said. "Guess you're right. Excuse me while I go curl up with a good book."

He blundered noisily toward the row of empty berths at the rear of the plane.

THE TERRIBLE SKUAS

THE Smithsonian Institute has recently added to its collections some specimens of birds that live further south than any other birds on earth. They are called skuas and are described as very fierce and brutal killers by members of the Byrd expedition who collected them. They are extremely rare in museum collections because they are so difficult to shoot and almost impossible to capture alive.

Living in a region where the survival of the fittest is the only law, they have been able to survive because of their viciousness. The skua, unlike other Antarctic birds who hug the shores of the continent, often go as far as 300 miles inland. They spend their winters in the north, but with the coming of the southern summer in mid-October, the skua moves to the Antarctic coasts. They arrive just as the egg-laying season of the penguin begins and proceed to eat every egg or chick they can find. They often destroy the chicks and eggs without eating them and the half eaten and trampled bodies of young penguin chicks are a common sight during the hatching season. Because the parent penguins can easily defeat a skua, the skua has had to discover ways of luring the chicks away from their parents before attacking them.

The skua is very strong and can fly for great distances while carrying pieces of meat bigger than itself. They are very noisy and quarrelsome even among themselves and often fight one another. They are about the only example in the animal world where parents desert their offspring before they are able to adequately provide for themselves. The parents do not brood their young, show them any love, or try to protect them from the elements. In many cases they don't even take the trouble to feed them.

Young skuas are born with an evil temper and disposition. The nest usually contains two eggs and after hatching the young fight each other. One chick is often a little weaker than the other and is soon killed and eaten by its brother or sister. In fact, if food becomes scarce, the young are usually eaten by their parents, who have even been known to eat their own eggs. This cannibalistic instinct is fortunate for the penguins since it tends to keep down the population of the skuas.

VITAMIN A FOR COLOR BLINDNESS

ACCORDING to Drs. Knight Dunlap and Robert D. Loken, of the University of California in Los Angeles, vitamin A can be taken by color blind persons to improve their color vision sufficiently to pass a color test.

Sixteen persons were used as a test of this theory. They were divided into two groups so that one person in each group had about the same degree of color blindness as one person in the other group. For twelve days, the members of one group were given one capsule with 25,000 units of vitamin A each day. They also gave the members of the other group a capsule each day which they believed contained vitamin A but really was filled with milk sugar. The members of the group getting vitamin A were able to reduce the total number of errors from 88 to 38 on a color blindness test while the other group made practically the same number of errors after the twelve-day test.

The doctors found that the time element is important in some of the cases while heavy dosages of the vitamin can clear up other cases in a short time. Thus science, by experimentation, overcomes another human aberration.

The Chameleon Man

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

I'VE got an office in the *Daily Standard* building and sometimes when things are slow in my line—theatrical bookings—I drift upstairs and talk to the guy who writes the column, The Soldier's Friend, for the *Standard*.

On this particular morning I walked into his office and found it empty so I sat down and waited, figuring he was downstairs getting a mug of coffee. After I cleaned my nails and glanced through Jake's mail I propped my feet up on the desk and relaxed.

Things in my line were strictly stinkeroo. With the army taking an option on every available hunk of male flesh, it made it pretty tough to get acts together. Of course, I still had a few dollies to peddle, but the situation don't look too good there, what with the WAVES and the WAACS and the demand from factories for powder-puff riveters.

I sighed and moodily contemplated my uncreased trouser legs and thought of my non-existence bank balance. Whoever said war was hell, sure hit the nail on the head.

The door opened and I heard a shuffle of footsteps on the floor. I tipped my derby back and looked up, expecting to see Jake, but the office was empty.

The door was standing open and I scratched my head. Maybe it had blown open. Then I remembered the sound of footsteps I'd heard and my bewilderment increased.

"Hello," a voice said.

My feet came down from the desk

Perfect adaptation, that's what it was. When a human being can blend with his surroundings, funny things can happen!

"Oh!" she screamed, and leaped from the chair

with a crash. I sat up straight and stared about the small room.

"Who said that?" I demanded.

"I did. I'm right here." It was the same voice and I jerked my head in the direction of the sound.

For an instant I didn't see a thing. But then, my eyes seemed suddenly to focus, and I saw a tall, lanky young man standing a few feet from me. He had a shock of straw colored hair and mild blue eyes. He wore a light suit.

"Can you see me now?" he asked, and his voice sounded strained, as if he were exerting himself in some manner.

"Yes, I can see you," I said. I was a little nettled. "What do you mean coming in and scaring people that way?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to scare you. I just can't help it. I'll have to relax now."

"You'll have to what? Are you—"

I broke off and goggled. The young man had completely disappeared. My forehead was suddenly damp with nervous perspiration. I closed my eyes and forced myself to think calmly. This was some trick of my imagination. I'd been working too hard. My nerves were shot. I'd have to take a rest.

I opened my eyes cautiously. The room was empty. I drew a relieved breath.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you," a familiar voice said apologetically. "But, you see, I can't help it."

I stood up warily and peered about the room.

"Where are you?" I whispered.

"Right here in front of you."

"If you're a mahout for pink elephants, I don't want to see you," I said. "Go away."

"Please," the young man's voice was plaintive, "I need your advice. I'm in trouble."

"That's too bad," I said, edging toward the door.

"Please listen to me. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"From your viewpoint, no," I said.

"If you'll look carefully you can see me," the voice said. "That's what bothers most people. I mean not being able to see me."

"How stupid of them to be bothered by a little thing like that," I said, trying not to gibber. But in spite of my common sense I did peer closely at the area the young man had occupied and I saw a very remarkable thing.

I SAW the vague, indistinct shape of the straw-haired, blue-eyed young man standing exactly where I had seen him the first time. But the effect was so uncertain and shadowy that I was hardly able to trust my eyes.

The young man seemed to blend into the background, which happened to be a desk, water cooler and wall, so evenly and completely that it was impossible to see him at all.

But even so, seeing him, however fuzzily, was a relief.

"It's a good trick," I said cautiously.

"It's not a trick," the young man said, aggrieved. "It's something I can't help."

"Oh yeah? Well how does it happen that I was able to see you when you came in?"

"I was exerting my will power," the young man said. "But that's awfully tiring. I had to relax a moment or so and when I did you weren't able to see me quite so distinctly."

I found my curiosity stirring. Maybe the guy was a crackpot or phony, but it wouldn't hurt to hear his story. In my line, with things as lean as they are, you can't afford to miss any bets.

"What makes you pop on and off like an electric light?" I asked. "Must be

a tiring way to go through life."

"You don't know the half of it," the young man said mournfully. "I've only been this way for a few months, but it seems like it's been years."

"Well, go on," I said. "Spill your troubles. Why should Mr. Anthony have all the fun?"

"What?"

"Never mind. Shoot."

"I'm not sure what causes me to fade-out like this. I've been to a half dozen doctors and psychiatrists and they aren't sure either. But it has something to do with personality development, they think. The last psychiatrist I visited told me that I had a very colorless personality and abnormal inhibitions and frustrations. He said that my present condition was a physical manifestation of my colorless personality."

I shook my head disgustedly.

"That sounds about as asinine as the droolings of the average psychiatrist," I muttered. "He didn't know and spent an hour saying so, I'll bet."

"It's awful," the young man sighed disconsolately. "I can make myself visible for a little while but it's awfully tiring. The rest of the time I go around like a ghost. I blend into the background so completely that people just don't notice me at all. It's just like not being alive." *

I studied the vague shape of the young man carefully. I could see him, but only by straining my eyes. The whole thing was amazing. Looking carefully, I realized that the young man was *not* invisible; he was just easy to miss because he was so inconspicuously blended into the background of the office.

"You'd probably have a fine time on a patch work quilt," I said.

The young man shuddered.

"Please don't joke," he said imploringly. "I'm in real trouble. I need help."

"I'll say you do," I said. "But I don't see what I can do for you."

"It's this," the young man said. "My draft board just deferred me with a 4-F classification. They told me I wouldn't be any good in my present shape. So there."

I looked at the young phantom.

"Well—go on!"

"Go on? That's all there is to it. They've rejected me. They won't take me."

"And that's your problem?"

"Naturally."

I SHOOK my head. It takes all kinds, I guess.

"Now listen to me," I said. "If the army doesn't want you, consider yourself lucky."

* The young man's peculiar physical condition is not as fantastic and unprecedented as one might at first believe. Everyone has had the experience of meeting a person who makes almost no impression whatsoever on them. People with such anemia of the personality are constantly being forgotten, overlooked even by friends who know them well. Their presence in a room will be unobserved for several minutes and, frequently, such people will be completely ignored, even when they are sitting or standing in plain view. In nature, the chameleon has similar properties but for a definite reason, namely that of defense against its stronger enemies. The chameleon blends perfectly into the brown and green foliage of its native habitat and even the marvelously keen eyes of its natural enemies are unable to detect its presence. It is not impossible to conceive that the same camouflaging property could develop in a human being. Nature might appreciate the difficulty of a retiring, sensitive person to mingle with his more vivid fellow creatures, and so clothe him with a defensive armor of practical invisibility to insulate him against the attacks of those with stronger personalities. Readers of *Fantastic Adventures* will remember John York Cabot's classic, "The Man the World Forgot," as an exposition of this theme. Unexplained instances of men and women "disappearing" from normal environments might be simply cases of submerged personalities which did not "disappear" but were simply and tragically forgotten.—Ed

"But I want to get in," the young man protested. "I won't feel right until I am in service."

"You left that psychiatrist too soon," I muttered. "Anyway, what do you expect me to do?"

"Why, I was sure you could help me," the young man said. "You're the Soldier's Friend, aren't you? You write the column of advice to the Yanks in the *Standard,* don't you?"

I got it then. This wraith thought I was the Soldier's Friend. That's why he was spilling himself to me.

He continued. "You know all the angles of the various branches of the Service, and I hoped you'd be able to recommend some branch that could use me. I'm willing to do anything or go anywhere. If you'll help me I'll put myself completely in your hands."

"Now just a minute," I said. "You've got the wrong idea. The guy you want to see "

I closed my big mouth with a snap. What was wrong with me? Were my brains on a permanent vacation? Here was opportunity hammering and banging at my door and I was too deaf to hear a sound.

This hard-to-see young man was a natural for show business. I already had an act lined up that he would fit as neatly as five fingers in a glove. And he was practically begging me to take him under my wing.

"Young man," I said. "You impress me as being sincere and earnest. And for that reason I am going to try and help you."

"Oh, gosh, thanks."

"It's the least I can do," I said. "But," I added sternly, "you've got to put yourself completely in my hands. You mustn't question a thing I tell you to do. You see, this isn't going to be easy. I'll have to go about it in a rather roundabout way. And it may take a little while."

"Oh, I don't care," the young man said happily. "Anything you say is all right with me."

"Fine." I glanced at my watch. "We've got to go now. You follow me."

"Sure, Mr.—"

"Flannigan," I said automatically.

"But, Mr. Flannigan, that isn't the name you use on your column."

"Naturally," I said. "Very sharp of you to catch that. I might get you into Intelligence, even if only as a decoy. The name I use on the column is a pseudonym."

"Oh!"

"Now come along with me."

I hurriedly got my young phantom out of the Soldier's Friend office before anyone could butt in and ruin everything. When we were safely ensconced in my own office, I waved the young man to a chair.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Horatio Heely," he replied.

I WAS becoming more enthused every minute. Looking at him, or *trying* to look at him, seated in a chair, convinced me of his enormous potentialities. The chair was brown leather and, at first glance, the only thing that indicated that it was occupied, was a slight indentation in the seat and back of the chair. Horatio blended in perfectly with the deep brown of the chair and his face, which stuck up six or eight inches, was invisible against the grayness of the wall.

"Maybe you could get me into the Coast Guard," he said.

I frowned. "I hardly think so," I said. "I know the Commander over there but I don't think I could swing it. Now, remember, you're going to leave everything in my hands."

The door of my office opened then

and a slim, stunning blonde walked in, followed by a tall, gaunt, sober individual with a gloomy face and deep black eyes. He wore a turban with an imitation jewel set in the center folds, squarely over his high forehead.

"Hah!" this character cried. "I suppose again you will tell me there is nothing for Mystiffio The Great, today."

"Ix-nay," I snapped. "Ut-shay up-yay!"

The blonde looked at me, eyebrows raising.

"What gives, mastermind?"

This was the act I had in mind for Horatio. Mystiffio was a fair magician and his line of patter wasn't bad. The blonde, whose name was Alice, acted as a prop, and with her looks and Mystiffio's line they didn't do badly. But with Horatio in the act it would be tremendous.

He would blend perfectly into the stage background. Invisible, he could assist Mystiffio with the hocus-pocus and really produce some wonderful effects.

Alice was still looking at me as if I'd gone batty.

"Just trust Uncle," I said hastily. "I got a great new angle for your act."

"You act as if you've been out in the sun too long," Alice murmured. "But don't mind me."

With a weary sigh she sank into the brown leather chair. And one-tenth of a second later she leaped to her feet with a scream. She wheeled about, hand raised to slap, and then as she stared at the seemingly empty chair, an expression of wonderment stole over her pretty face.

"What—I could have sworn I—" She turned to me pleadingly. "What is it? Am I going screwy or is there somebody sitting in that chair?"

"Horatio," I said. "Exert a little willpower and show yourself."

"All right, Mr. Flannigan," Horatio's voice from the chair answered.

Mystiffio moved nervously toward the door.

"I don't believe it," he said. His broad dark face was an unhappy mixture of fear and surprise.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Alice cried. She was staring at the chair, or rather at Horatio, who had suddenly become visible.

I MADE the introductions quickly.

"Now that's enough, Horatio," I said. "You can turn yourself off again. I don't want you to wear out."

"Thanks," Horatio said gratefully. He smiled faintly at Alice. "Pleased to have met you," he said. Then he vanished into the brown background of the chair.

"Get me a drink!" Mystiffio said. He grasped the edge of the desk and stared solemnly at the empty brown chair. "Get me two drinks."

"What is it?" Alice demanded. "How do you do it? Mirrors? Lighting? It's terrific."

"It's completely on the level. Now here's the angle. I'm going to put this guy into your act. Wait'll the crowds get a load of Mystiffio's magic then. With Horatio in the background pulling the strings he'll make Thurston look like an amateur parlor entertainer."

Mystiffio turned to me stiffly.

"What," he said frigidly, "makes you think I need an invisible man to help me in my act? I am perfectly capable of astounding and amazing an audience by myself."

"You're quoting your own press notices now," I said. "I know; I wrote 'em."

"And what makes you think I'm not as good as Thurston?" Mystiffio asked

in an injured voice.

"Ah, temperament!" I murmured. I turned to Alice. "You work on him. You can see that Horatio will be a good thing, can't you? You don't want your act to die, do you?"

"Mr. Flannigan." It was Horatio. His voice sounded apologetic. "I don't want to disturb you, but what has all this got to do with getting me into the army? You sound more like a booking agent than the Soldier's Friend."

Alice looked at me.

"Heel," she said. "What kind of line are you giving him?"

"Horatio," I said. "I am disappointed. I expected a little trust from you. Didn't I tell you it might be a little while before I got things set? This angle I'm working now will put you practically into the army."

"Yeah! How?"

"I'm going to line you up doing an act for the U. S. O. Does that show you my heart's in the right place?"

"There will be a short pause for catcalls and boos," Alice murmured.

"All right," Horatio said with a sigh. "I'll go along with you."

"Fine," I said. "And just to get you used to army life I'm going to start paying you fifty bucks a month."

"You great big generous man," Alice said and I think there was a twinge of sarcasm in her voice.

"Now that's no way to talk," I said. "I'm doing the lad a favor."

"Yeah," she said. "I'm sure you are. Just like a man picking up a dollar bill is doing the street cleaners a favor."

"You don't understand my noble motives," I said, "so I will not talk about them anymore. Tomorrow we start rehearsing the new act."

WELL, sir, it was absolutely amazing the way Horatio picked that act up. With his dexterous, invisible help Mystiffio performed like the paragon of all prestidigitators. Alice added a jolt of high-voltage eye-appeal to the ensemble, by smiling sweetly and wearing a black satin bathing suit that had been designed by some patriotic person who believed in saving material to the point of cutting down on essentials.

I was sure, for the first time in my stretch in this loony business, that I had an option on a nice private little gold mine.

And I wasn't going to let anything upset my cartful of golden apples.

"Okay," I said. They were rehearsing on the stage of an empty theater which was owned by a guy I'd done some favors for. "You look pretty good, but don't let it go to your head. The act needs a lot of work. Keep at it. I'm going out to get a sandwich."

Alice put her hands on her hips and looked down at me.

"Everything is fifty-fifty with you, isn't it?" she said. "We do the work, you get the money. Nice even split."

"Careful, beautiful," I said. "You'll die of your own poisons, if you don't look out." I waved to her and left. After I'd had a bite to eat, I went to see one of the biggest agents in the business, the guy who books all the acts into the Capitol in New York.

"Look, Morry," I said, when his secretary had ushered me into his office, which was big enough to hold the World Series in, "I've really got something terrific lined up."

Morry looked up at me and his little eyes were uninterested. He yawned and dusted a fleck of dust from the sleeve of his coat.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It's a magician's act that—"

Morry shook his head. "Magicians are dead. Who wants to see rabbits pulled out of a hat?"

"This is different. This guy is good."

"All right, he's good," Morry said. "So what? We can't use him."

"But you ought to at least see the act," I pleaded. "It's got a honey of a girl, too."

"Girl?" Morry glanced up and there was a flicker of interest in his little eyes.

"Yeah, a honey."

"Well," Morry shrugged. "I can't promise anything, but we do need an act to fill in a spot within a week or so. But whatever I get has to be good. I can't send bums to New York."

"I know, I know," I said. My heart was hammering with hope. One break on the Stem and I'd be set. "When will you catch the act? Tomorrow be all right?"

Morry nodded.

I went back to the theatre walking about three feet from the ground. I felt I was in at last. It was a funny feeling I couldn't analyze, but I knew I was going to be in.

WHEN I walked into the little office back stage I found Alice there talking to Horatio.

She was saying, "There should be *something* you could do for the Army, Horatio," as I walked into the office.

Horatio was standing by the desk, shoulders slumped. I had to look twice to make him out against the background of the desk and wall.

Alice shut up when she saw me.

"Horatio and I were just talking," she said.

"Yeah," I said. "Now Horatio and I are going to do a little talking. Make yourself scarce."

Alice left and I turned to Horatio.

"What kind of a line was she giving you?" I snapped.

"Why, gosh, Mr. Flannigan," Horatio stammered. "She was just trying to help me. She's just as interested in getting me into the Army as you are. She's a wonderful girl, Mr. Flannigan."

There was something in his voice that brought me up with a jolt. The kid had fallen for the girl as sure as I stood there.

"Now, look," I said gently. "You really want to get set with Uncle Sam, don't you?"

"Why, sure."

"Then listen to me. I'm doing everything I can for you. And I've got a deal all lined up. I was just over at the Army recruiting station and I think everything is set. Not right away, but pretty soon."

"Gosh, that's wonderful."

"Now you know who your friend is." I came over beside him and put my hand on his shoulder. "I got a little piece of advice for you that I want you to take to heart. Stay away from this kid, Alice. She's no good for you."

"Now just a minute. You can't—"

"I'm sorry, kid," I said. I let my hand fall from his shoulder. "Maybe I shouldn't tell you, but—"

"Tell me what?"

"It's only for your own good I'm doing this. That pretty little blonde is just going to play you for a sucker. She's already married."

Horatio gasped. He must have been pretty sold on the girl.

"I don't believe it," he cried.

"It's God's truth."

"Who is the man?" Horatio cried brokenly.

"Mystiffio."

"Mystiffio!"

I nodded slowly. "It's a tough break, kid, but the sooner you forget her the better." I had already decided I'd get rid of her. She wouldn't be hard to replace. Horatio was my gold mine and I didn't want anyone

to do a scorched-earth job on him.

"But she never told me," he muttered.

"Naturally," I said. "She'll probably even deny she's married to him now, but don't let that fool you."

"No, sir," Horatio said. "She won't make a sucker out of me." His anger must have subconsciously affected his visibility mechanism for he was visible and his lean jaw was hard, but there was a hurt look in his clear blue eyes.

"That's the boy," I said. "Just remember who your friends are and you won't go wrong."

"I won't, Mr. Flannigan," he promised solemnly.

THE next afternoon Morry arrived to see the act. He was dressed in a natty pin stripe suit and he wore a big yellow carnation in the buttonhole, but his sallow face was impassive.

I escorted him down the dark empty theatre to the front row.

"Just hold your breath now," I told him. "I'll have the act on stage in a jiffy."

He yawned and glanced at his watch.

"I haven't got long," he said.

I went backstage and found Alice.

"Hurry up," I said. "Morry is waiting."

She looked at me as if I'd just crawled out from the wainscoating. "I've just talked to the kid," she said. "He thinks I'm poison. What kind of a yarn have you been feeding him?"

"Me? Why, honey, that hurts. Do you think your Uncle Patrick would breathe an unkind word about you?"

"Well, it's mighty strange," she said. "He won't even tell me what's biting him."

"I wouldn't pay any attention to him," I said. "Perhaps it's all for the best."

"Hmmm," she said, eyeing me shrewdly.

"Come on now, be a good kid and get things rolling. A lot depends on this you know."

I went back and joined Morry.

Well the act was terrific. Mystiffio had Morry's eyes sticking out inside of thirty seconds. I hadn't told Morry about Horatio. I figured I'd let that angle ride for a while.

But Morry was really impressed.

"The guy is good," he said. "The things he does don't seem humanly possible."

Of course he didn't know that most of the effects were being created by the invisible Horatio but what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. And he didn't miss Alice, either. When she came on stage in her cute, abbreviated little costume, he straightened up and opened his eyes.

"The kid is nice," he murmured.

"Are we in?" I demanded.

"Can't say yet. I gotta talk to the act but I'd say your chances were pretty good."

I almost swooned with happiness. The break I'd been waiting for all my life was here at last. The golden apples were about ready to drop into my lap.

WHEN Mystiffio finished his routine I took Morry backstage. I found Alice.

"Here she is, Morry," I said. "And she's just as nice as she looks." I shoved Alice toward him. "Be nice, baby," I hissed in her ear.

Morry took one of her little hands and his eyes were interested.

"I kinda like the act," he said. "If you could find time to be nice to me I might like it a whole lot."

Alice takes her hand back as if it had accidentally brushed something slimy.

"I'm sorry but I don't go with the act," she snapped. "There are some things worth more to me than three meals a day and a paycheck."

"Okay, sister," Morry said without expression. He turned to me. "Guess I made a mistake coming up here. The act is lousy."

"Now wait a minute," I yelled. "You said it was good. You can't walk out now." I wheeled to Alice. "Baby, baby, don't do this to me. Tell him you're sorry."

Mystiffio came up behind us while we were talking.

"What is the matter?" he asked. I noticed he put an arm around Alice's shoulders. I was too distraught to think about it.

"Nothing's wrong," I said desperately. "Alice just took offense at something Morry said. Nobody meant any harm."

Mystiffio drew himself up straight and he grabbed Morry by the lapels. Morry struggled to free himself but he was pinioned helplessly.

"You cad! You bounder!" Mystiffio roared. "Do you mean you've been making advances to my daughter?"

Daughter! How do you like that! That just goes to show you never to trust people.

Morry pulled himself loose.

"You're all crazy," he shouted. "Lemme out of here."

He wheeled and started away, but before he had taken two strides he collided with a solid, unyielding, invisible substance.

He backed away a few steps, his mouth working in terror.

"What is it?" he screamed.

"I'm sorry," Horatio's voice sounded in the air a few feet from Morry.

Morry's face went white; he stared wildly about for another instant and then charged madly out of the theatre, screaming in terror.

I CHASED after him, but it was a hopeless effort. When I got to the sidewalk he was gone. Moodily I slumped back into the theatre and went backstage. My big opportunity was gone, but I still had Horatio.

I found Alice in the office and she was alone. She smiled sweetly when she saw me.

"You too, Brutus," I muttered. Then I thought about my meal ticket and looked worriedly around the room.

"Where's Horatio?" I snapped.

"Horatio," she smiled, "is gone. Too bad you missed him. He would have liked to say goodbye."

"Goodbye!" I shrieked. "Where's he going?"

"Into the Army," Alice said sweetly. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"You're crazy," I shouted. "The Army won't take him."

"I arranged a little something for him," Alice said. "I'm sure he'll be very useful in the camouflage department."

Camouflage!

I groaned and sank into a chair.

"Yes," Alice said pleasantly, "when he learned that Mystiffio was my father — not my husband as you so cleverly told him—he was quite angry for a while. But of course he felt better when he thought it over. And he was very happy to take my suggestion to apply for a commission in the camouflage. I think Horatio and I are going to get along nicely."

I groaned again.

Mystiffio stuck his head in the door.

"Goodbye," he said. "Ready, dear?"

"Yes," Alice said, moving to the door. "I'm ready."

"Now wait a minute," I cried. "Where are you two going? You're

the last act I've got."

"I am enlisting!" Mystiffio said proudly.

"As what?"

"Signal corps, in charge of messenger pigeons."

Mystiffio flapped his coat tail and a lone pigeon fluttered into the air. "I've had a lot of experience with the little devils."

I groaned again and dropped my head in my hands.

What was left?

When I looked up, Mystiffio and Alice had gone.

For a moment I sat there staring about the quiet dusty office. Then I stood up and I knew what I was going to do.

I put my hat on and walked out of the building. I didn't stop walking until I reached the Marine recruiting office. A big poster said, "The Marines Promise You Action!"

I walked in. Nothing could be worse than what I'd just been through. I felt contented for the first time in sixteen years.

POISON IVY

HOW in the world Junior ever got that case of ivy poisoning when he was in the house all week may be solved by looking at Junior's pet dog. According to L. W. Kephart of the Bureau of Plant Industry, mysterious cases of ivy poisoning may often be traced to a pet dog. Dogs brush against ivy plants and bring home the chemically irritating principle on their fur. The person who then strokes the dog may come down with ivy poisoning. Handling shoes, tools or clothing that have been in contact with the plant can also cause ivy poisoning.

The plant is most poisonous in spring or early summer when the sap is most abundant, but dry, dead plants, and especially the smoke from burning plants can cause poisoning.

To prevent poisoning, remove the irritant from the surface of the skin before it has time to penetrate it. Wash exposed skin immediately with baking soda dissolved in warm water and then with a heavy lather of strong soap followed by a rinse in warm, running water. Baking soda, borax, and photographer's "hypo" are all helpful. Several washings in strong soap following the wash in an alkali solution will carry away the poisonous substance.

Chewing the poison ivy leaves in attempt at desensitization to the poisonous principle of the plant is warned against. Dr. Seymour H. Silvers, of Brooklyn, New York, reports the case of a woman who, having had ivy poisoning from contact with the plant had been advised to chew the leaves of the plant with the idea of preventing any further attacks. As a result she developed a severe eruption on her lips and face. Her tongue and cheeks were so inflamed that she could scarcely eat for two days.

Protection against ivy poisoning is frequently attempted by injecting gradually increasing doses of the poisonous substance, similar to the desensitization treatments for hay fever. While it is possible to try giving this treatment by mouth it is not wise to chew the poison ivy leaves for the dosage cannot be controlled properly.

STARCH FROM KAFIR

RESEARCH work at Kansas State College indicates that starch may soon be made commercially from kafir, a grain-yielding sorghum. J. W. Greene, assistant professor of Chemical engineering, began a project on July 1, 1937, determined to find some way to use kafir.

The fact that kafir possesses starch as a component part has been known for years but chemists have had difficulty separating it from the rest of grain on a profitable scale for commercial use.

The work of testing, studying and examining the tiny kernels of grain has gone on for two and one-half years and, although months of work are admittedly still ahead, the research workers believe that the success of their project is almost certain.

The advantages of kafir over corn are cheaper production, possibility of processing more cheaply and increased value per unit of material. If the final result reaches present hopes, farmers may plant hundreds of acres of kafir in the land which is now windswept and arid in the section formerly called the "dust bowl." The crop would tie the soil with its root systems and yet yield a profitable crop.

RADIO NEWS *for November*

The Complete Story of the U.S. Signal Corps....

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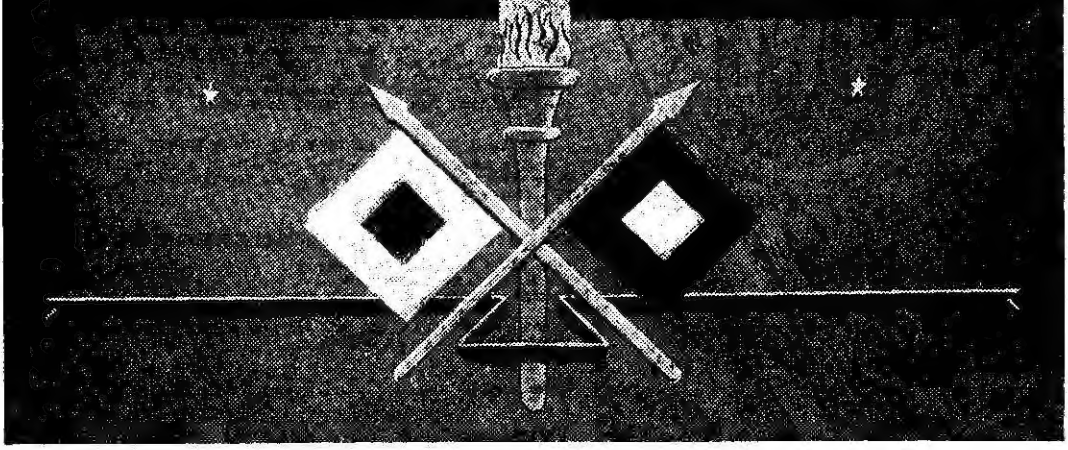
The special November U. S. Signal Corps issue of RADIO NEWS presents a complete, authoritative account of the vital communications branch of the Service. Written entirely by Signal Corps officers, each of whom is an expert in his branch of the Service, this special issue of RADIO NEWS includes brilliantly illustrated articles on: The Signal Corps in War, The New Signal Corps, History, Development of Field Sets, Signal Corps Research, Laboratories, Meteorology, Training, Army Signal Service, Signal Corps in Aviation, Supplies, Signal Corps Equipment in Mechanized Units, Portable Ground Signal Equipment, Communications by Wire, Army Amateur Radio Systems, Photography and many other functions of the Service. A special section has been given over to the Signal Corps Radio Course, made available in this form for the first time — valuable instruction for future Signal Corps men as well as reference guide to all members of the Signal Corps. Also featured are two special pictorial sections in natural color and in black-and-white gravure of fine salon quality — striking photographs of the Signal Corps in action.



U.S. SIGNAL CORPS ISSUE RADIO NEWS AT YOUR NEWSSTAND NOW

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

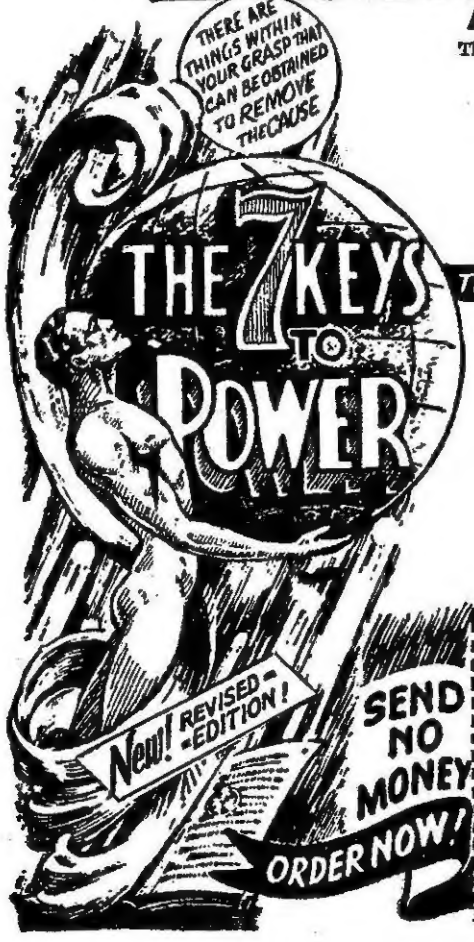
He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS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SAILING SHIP OF VENUS

The ocean-going vessel of Venus is propelled with wooden sails constructed on the Venetian blind principle. ***Story on page 138.***